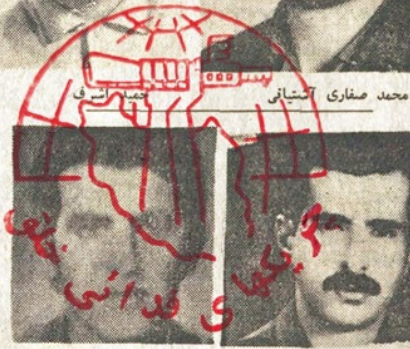




CALL TO ARMS



IRAN'S MARXIST REVOLUTIONARIES

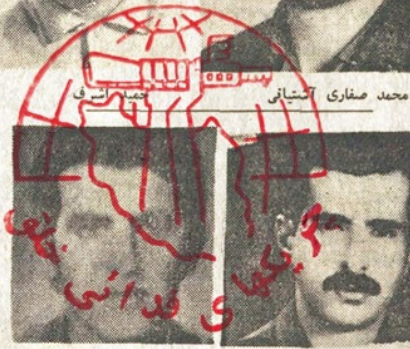


FORMATION AND EVOLUTION
OF THE FADA'IS, 1964-1976

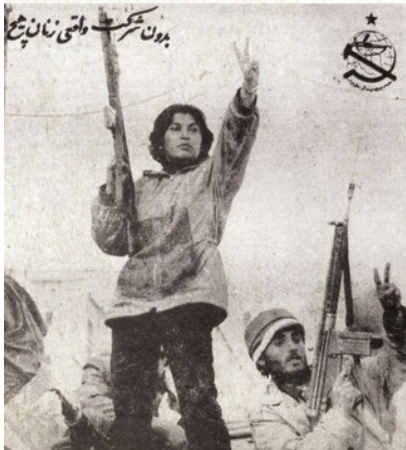
ALI RAHNEMA



CALL TO ARMS



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FORMATION AND EVOLUTION
OF THE FADA'IS, 1964-1976

ALI RAHNEMA



احمد زبیرم



CALL TO ARMS

IRAN'S MARXIST REVOLUTIONARIES



اسکندر صادق نواد



FORMATION AND EVOLUTION
OF THE FADA'IS, 1964-1976

ALI RAHNEMA

Praise for

Call to Arms

Iran's Marxist Revolutionaries

'Rahnema has done the staggeringly difficult task of offering us a meticulously researched history of the life and times of the Fada'is in late-Pahlavi Iran.'

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'Bypassing existing studies, Ali Rahnema's Call to Arms reconstructs the formation and peak activities of Iran's Fada'i guerrillas, relying almost entirely on the movement's own literature and other contemporary primary sources. Meticulous and riveting, this book works like a time-tunnel, taking us back to experience "first-hand" the dramatic heroics and painful tragedy of radical political opposition in 1960s–1970s Iran.'

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'Ali Rahnema's Call to Arms delivers like a ray of hope, translating foregone pieties of a revolutionary age into the determined course of thinking, doing, and

being. This book is an act of redemption, not just of the Iranian Marxist revolutionaries but also of the spirit of the age that demanded armed uprising against tyranny. What Rahnema achieves is a microcosm of a revolutionary age at work far beyond Iranian borders – from Asia to Africa to Latin America – that precisely in its noble political failures succeeded in building a notion of national sovereignty that forever dismantled any and all claims to state legitimacy. Nations were formed and national consciousness forged by the failed phantom of liberty these revolutionaries imagined and enacted. Read this book with a measure of due reverence. You are in the presence of ennobling legends.’

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CALL TO ARMS

Iran's Marxist Revolutionaries

FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE
FADA'IS, 1964-1976

ALI RAHNEMA



To the memory of Hamid Habibi, a radical intellectual of the left and a gentleman farmer who had agreed to read this manuscript first.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Iranian contemporary history is full of unexplored and half-hidden episodes and periods on which Iranians are divided. The social impact and significance of these periods are often manifested in heated debates, exchanges, and ultimately judgements passed many years or decades later. If after half a century Iranians continue to talk about and debate the merits and shortcomings of Siyahkal and the subsequent actions of the Fada'i guerrillas, it simply means that the period has marked the social psyche of generations. Charting the proper topography of such periods is an ongoing process. It requires the continuous effort of historians looking at such events with their respective sensitivities and outlooks, and the research material available to them. In the preliminary stages of such historiography the terrain can only be partially illuminated. The final cartography will be produced in time as more investigations are carried out and more light is shed.

The history of the Iranian Marxist revolutionaries, the Fada'is, is the subject of this study – whence they came, what they sought, and how they fared. The emphasis is on the formative years of those political groups, which turned to armed struggle as their method of fostering change. It traces the origins, evolution, interaction, and process by which two groups merged to form the People's Fada'i Guerrillas in early 1971 and examines the activities of the Fada'is until the summer of 1976. The chronology for this book turned out to be lengthy. The details of team formations, members, activities, armed operations, street battles, arrests, and executions are included in the chronology. I would recommend reading it before starting with the text as it provides a general impression of the context and events.

Understanding the history and impact of the Fada'is necessitates answering numerous questions. What was their genealogy and lineage? What was their theoretical and ideological genesis? How did pre-Fada'i circles and groups take

shape, blend, and develop? What did their theoreticians think? How was the Siyahkal strike planned, carried out, and what were its outcomes? To what extent did the pre-Fada'i groups transcend or retain their original identity as they morphed into the People's Fada'i Guerrillas? How did they act and evolve after they became the Fada'is? What were their political expectations and objectives? How and why did Bijan Jazani, the leader of a pre-Fada'i group, launch an ideological campaign from prison against the prevalent revolutionary philosophy of the Fada'is fighting the regime? How was this ideological challenge received and responded to? What was the impact of the guerrillas' activities on the general public, and on student sympathizers in and outside the country? Finally, did the Fada'is play a role in the fall of the Shah and the 1979 Iranian revolution? The object of this study is not only to take a step towards constructing the Fada'i history, but to place the ideas of their theoreticians in the context of Marxist–Leninist thought. The Fada'is will also be situated in relation to the ideas and positions of the Tudeh Party, their non-revolutionary Marxist contenders.

A major difficulty with tracing and reconstructing the history of the Fada'is is finding reliable sources. The basic factual foundations necessary to construct the history of any clandestine revolutionary group can be elusive. In the case of the Fada'is, the task becomes even more difficult. Archives provide raw information in terms of dates, times, participants, events, and facts. In 2020, such annals on the pre-Fada'is and Fada'is do not exist. Ironically, the fairly reliable archival sources available on them are those of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the American Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS). In these two repositories, facts, dates, hearsay, approximations, analysis, opinion, and prejudice are detectable and identifiable. The Iranian press provides partial facts, partial SAVAK (secret police) misinformation and, at times, total dissimulation of Fada'i activities. It remains, however, most useful in terms of providing dates, even if events reported on those dates include disinformation and should be handled with care.

Finding correct dates of any kind becomes a taxing task. Writing a historical account without establishing a chronology, without understanding and determining historical associations, causes, and effects, based on dates, is most challenging. In state-run publications, the frequency of expressions such as “after a while” (pas az chandi), “from now on” (az in pas), “in this period” (dar in dowran), “as time passes by gradually” (ba gozasht-e zaman andak andak), becomes frustrating and confusing. Studying events in a time void is almost like

reading a piece of science fiction with no tangible historical time markers and indicators.

The value and veracity of the literature on the Fada'is published after the revolution by various state-run archives, security-related think tanks, and state-employed researchers or authors with free access to SAVAK files is even more complex. These works are most often based on SAVAK reports of events, SAVAK instructions or evaluations, interrogation reports on the activities of arrested guerrillas, and monographs on or profile assessments of key combatants by other arrested comrades. The information obtained under duress from arrested Fada'is, even if published in its entirety, would have to be treated cautiously. Relying on interrogation reports can be completely misleading as most purposefully distort undivulged information, mislead and confuse their interrogators, and dissimulate the identity of their team members, contacts, and liaisons. Yet all information in interrogation reports cannot be ruled out as disinformation. Useful information, however, can be extracted from these sources. Those arrested and interrogated are sometimes re-interrogated once new information connecting them with previously undisclosed "subversive" activities is divulged. In these circumstances, they sometimes disclose dated information concerning operations or events useful to a researcher but dead wood for the interrogator. Sifting between disinformation and useful information becomes difficult. The independent researcher must make an intelligent guess as to whether the interrogation report referred to by the state-run publications is the prisoner's first, second, third, or umpteenth report. Depending on the prisoner being interrogated, each report may be assumed to have been written after a torture session.

The state-run publications seldom publish the actual SAVAK letter, report, or interrogation account in full. In earlier state-run publications almost entire documents both in the original version and typed version were made available. Later publications replaced this tradition with their "analysis" based on unpublished documents.¹

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Research becomes ever more complicated when state-run think tanks publish documents in the form of chopped-up and selected passages or pages.

There are three key problems with state-controlled sources claiming to be based on SAVAK archives but failing to publish or purposefully withholding the

publication of the original document. First, evidence and sources are chosen selectively by authors, dissimulating the context and the time period. In the absence of access to the original documents, verification of the veracity of such sources and their content becomes impossible. Second, such sources seldom contain dates, chronology, and a systematic presentation of events, relations, or decisions. SAVAK reports published in their entirety contain valuable information. They reveal the subject and the issue at hand, the date of the report and event, and the place where it is taking place. They also disclose the formal opinion of the SAVAK employee(s) receiving the report on the degree of veracity of the report and reflect the necessary follow-ups suggested. Sometimes the antecedent of the subject matter, and its background, are also referred to. Such important information helps with the understanding, development, and interlacing of events. Third, consultation of the sources constituting the bases of state-run publications are not open to the public, raising suspicions of prejudice and bias on the part of the authors of such works. The academic independence, credentials, and objectivity of authors of such works is, at best, questionable. These factors cast a long shadow of doubt on the content of such compilations and narratives.

Given the inability to consult the actual SAVAK documents and faced with bits and pieces selectively quoted in state-run publications, researchers must make do with what is made available to them in such texts. They are put in the sensitive position of accepting some and rejecting other information. To the extent that the literature published on the “basis” of SAVAK sources can be verified and checked by memoirs or writings of the direct actors or surviving actual players, researchers can separate the wheat from the chaff. In the absence of such independent memory banks, researchers will be obliged to use their discretion and intuition to make a call. Here we are swimming in murky waters. Faced with conflicting evidence, the researcher needs to present it.

Nevertheless, to move towards completing the jigsaw puzzle, one needs to choose from the available information in the absence of proven evidence. At this point, the study becomes intuitive, where claims become multiple, and the tools for ascertaining facts are unavailable. This work has tried to rely on evident facts as much as possible, but it is by no means free of intuitive deductions. Wherever use has been made of information obtained in interrogation reports, reference has been made in the relevant footnotes.

During the past twenty years, veterans of the Fada'i movement from different

generations have published their recollections in the form of single-authored books, articles, interviews, edited volumes, and compilations. These works are most useful as they shed light on a specific, and therefore limited, geographical location of the Fada'i map during the precise time when the narrator was directly involved with the movement. Classifying such information, and making good use of it in constructing the Fada'i history, after verification, requires posing a few preliminary questions: Which generation did the author/reporter belong to? Did he or she first become associated with the pre-Fada'is or the Fada'is? Was he/she associated with the Jazani or the Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi pre-Fada'i groups? Was he/she a clandestine combatant? When was he/she arrested and for what? Did the narrator go underground after being released from prison, and when? Was the reporter fighting, in prison, or overseas? With which side of the prison debate did the narrator identify? With which of the many factions of the Fada'is that emerged after 1979 did the narrator identify?

Even though there are no straightforward, or categorical answers to some of these questions, they help situate the authors/narrators and their story in the wide geography of the Fada'i history. The purpose of these hypothetical questions is not to homogenize and pigeonhole individuals, but to best understand their perspective. The very short life expectancy of active guerrillas (typically six months), and the fast pace at which new crops of combatants took the place of fallen ones, makes historical reconstruction difficult.

If we trace the genesis of the pre-Fada'i groups formed around the idea of armed struggle to around 1964–1965, we are trying to reconstruct events that occurred some fifty-five years ago. The daunting reality is that, among those who constituted the forefathers or pillars of the original groups, no one has survived. Very few key personalities considered as the companions of the pioneers were still at hand during the research phase of this study and threw light on certain aspects of Fada'i history. But their crucial insight was limited to their own period and circle of involvement. This study has benefitted from the most useful input of some of these companions. They have helped enormously in reconstructing a history of the periods that they were directly involved with. The rest is detective work – part fact, and part hopefully informed speculation. I am indebted to those who responded graciously to my enquiries. Some of the questions I posed, I know, reminded them of their interrogations by SAVAK.

This work has long been in the making. It was bypassed several times by other projects, but never forgotten. The idea originated in 1997 when I was on

sabbatical at St. Antony's College. Fortuitously, during my stay there, someone whom I believe to be Ali Razavi, but he is not sure, landed me with a medium size cardboard box full of pamphlets, pertaining to the Fada'is. Just like that. This was a sign, as there was enough raw material in that box to start my foray. I returned to Paris, arranged the pamphlets, and from then on that treasure trove served as a reminder that I needed to delve into Fada'i history. I would ask questions, read on the topic, and arrange interviews intermittently.

I started serious work on this project some fifteen years later. I spent over a year familiarizing myself with the transformations of the Jazani Group by producing chronological organograms up to Siyahkal. Then I began with the obvious question: Why did the cream of the cream of Iranian university students, the educated, the sociopolitically conscious and the future builders of their country, turn to violence and arms? To address that question, I spent another year and a half ploughing through Iranian history from the 1953 coup to the assassination of Prime Minister Hasan-'Ali Mansour in January 1965. That study by itself became too wordy and voluminous. I realized that, if I were to share with my readers the detailed historical context of state transformation between 1953 and 1965, by the time they finished reading how the Shah became a despot, they would forget the main topic. The detailed historical context of the evolution of the Iranian state had to be abandoned, and the study had to focus on the history and genesis of the Fada'is' call to arms.

In this research, I have relied on the goodwill and cooperation of many who decided to trust me with their experience and accounts. Some chose not to. An outsider poking his nose into the historical affair of the Fada'is needed connection and contact. My special thanks go to a good old friend, Shahram Qanbari. Throughout the years of research and writing, he has been my stone of patience "sang-e sabour" when I would get flustered with lacunas, inaccuracies, imprecisions, and conflicts in accounts, reports, and dates. He was the portal to some key people whose information has been indispensable in this study. His critical eyes and dogmatic fairness, when reading the early drafts, put me on the right path. I have also benefitted from three other hawk-eyed friends. My special thanks go also to Leyla Ebtehadj who helped put my English in order and raised a red flag when my sentences went running for way too long. She asked key questions and forced me to clarify my statements. Fereydoun Rashidiyan and Nazanin Jahanbani identified mistakes which I had missed even after multiple readings. I am most grateful to Ali Gheissari and Behrooz Mo'azami for reading the manuscript and making painstaking comments and corrections.

Transliteration is tedious except for Persian/Farsi language enthusiasts and experts. Whenever the transliteration in this text meets the standards of Persian/Farsi language experts it is the work of Shahram Qanbari and Ali Gheissari. Whenever there is a mishandling it is mine.

The list of those who helped me with this work is long, and I will not be able to do them all justice by thanking each individually. There are a few whom I need to single out specifically for the time they took to answer my detailed, and at times tedious questions, some over a long period. I would like to thank Mastoureh Ahmadzadeh, and pay my respects to the late Aqa Taher Ahmadzadeh, who both gave me a sense of the environment in which Mas'oud and Majid Ahmadzadeh grew up. Mastoureh Ahmadzadeh put me in touch with the late Bijan Hirmanpour, whose impeccable memory and candour were indispensable to this study.

My special thanks go also to Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, without whose patience and continuous help I would have made many more mistakes. He is the last of the direct actors and companions of the Jazani Group. His experiences date back to 1963–1964. At one point, Kianzad's memories of the Jazani Group overlap with those of Mehdi Same'. The two had gone to the same university. Same' provided me with a rich account of the political activities at Tehran's Polytechnic University and Ghafour Hasanpour's role in recreating and transforming the Jazani Group after 1968. Same''s excellent memory, and his rich experience between December 1966 and December 1971, were of great help in understanding the internal development of one of the two groups which constituted the Fada'is.

I am most grateful to Farhad Nomani, my old friend and colleague, who supported this endeavour and put me in contact with important actors. There are many more whom I am indebted to. I will name a few and beg the pardon of others: Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, Ne'mat Mirzazadeh, Soudabeh Jazani, Qasem Rashidi, 'Ali Tolou', Farrokh Negahdar, Reza 'Alamehzadeh, Morteza Siyahpoush, Mohammad-Reza Shalgouni, Roben Markarian, 'Ali-Asghar Izadi, Naqi Hamidiyan, Behrooz Mo'azami, Sheyda Nabavi, 'Ali Sattari, Heydar Tabrizi, 'Abbas Hashemi, 'Abdollah Qavami, Bahram Qobadi, Naser Rahim-Khani, Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour, and those who wished to remain anonymous. I am also grateful to Siavush Randjbar-Daemi for providing me with various useful documents. My special thanks to Novin Doostdar, Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, and Siavush Randjbar-Daemi of

Oneworld Publications for their warm reception and support. Finally, my special thanks to David Inglesfield, for the application of his truly magic wand to this text.

This work would have been much more difficult to undertake and probably more wanting had it not been for four crucial websites. My heartfelt thanks go to the Archive of the Iranian Opposition's Documents (Arshiv-e asnad-e opozisiyon-e Iran), Parastou Forouhar's forouharha.net, the Iranian Oral History Project at Harvard, and the Marxists Internet Archive. Aspects of all this work may be objectionable to those who helped create it, and if that may be the case, I apologize to them in advance. Research on the contemporary history of absolutist countries is not as dangerous as doing politics in them, but it is difficult. For some of the events described in this book, reliance has been placed on limited accounts or, at times, a sole eyewitness account, without additional third-party supporting evidence and other inaccessible primary sources and archives. Readers should regard these accounts and individuals involved with this limitation in mind. This work is the product of the author's research process and his interpretations. May there be many more books and interpretations on this topic.

Paris, May 2020

Notes

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Compare the almost complete presentation of SAVAK reports and letters (except for pp. 284–285) in *Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, Tehran: Markaz-e barrasi-e asnad-e tarikhi-e vezarat-e ettela‘at, 1380 (2001) with later works such as *Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi*, shomareh 57, vol. 2, Tabestan 1396 (2017).

Introduction

Upon her return to London after an eleven-week visit, Professor A.K.S. Lambton reported to the Foreign Office on her impressions of Iran. She had arrived in Tehran just after the fall of 'Ali Amini in June 1962. Based on her conversations with several unidentified sources in Iran, Lambton spoke, in her own mysterious manner, about the communist underground “stepping up subversion and showing growing interest in the possibility of guerrilla warfare”. She referred even to the province of Gilan as the area where the rebels intended to concentrate their efforts. Lambton was, as usual, highly perceptive of what was bubbling under the surface, and intuitively correct to predict the coming of armed struggle. She erred, however, in thinking that this future mode of violent political expression in Iran would be the outcome of the Tudeh Party’s “reorganization of its structure at the base”.¹

Clearly, Lambton could not predict the rise of revolutionary Marxism at odds with Tudeh Party conservatism, yet intuition demonstrated that she was on the right track.

From July 1961, Amini had shifted into a repressive gear against National Front political activities. At this time the idea of violent retaliation against state violence had begun to float among certain radical National Front students, who would later join the Iranian guerrilla movement. It would be fair to say that reflection and consideration of armed struggle against the regime began some two to three years later around 1963 and 1964.

To comprehend the attraction of organized armed struggle, it is important to get a sense of the factors which were pushing a new generation of revolutionaries to take up arms. There is little doubt that the Cuban Revolution (1953–1959), the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), the Vietnam War (1955–1975), and

the Palestinian Liberation Organization, founded in 1964, were important exogenous push factors. The politicized youth of the 1960s and 1970s breathed in an international air of radicalism, and some strain of Marxism–Leninism. The world background of revolutionary movements in the context of the Cold War certainly inspired the Iranian youth.

Some sixty years after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, simple political rights, liberties, and freedoms which had been fought for and obtained on paper continued to elude the Iranian people. Mosaddeq’s experience with democracy and non-violence had ended with the 1953 coup. The critical speeches of Ruhollah Khomeyni, questioning the Shah’s policies and his rising popularity, had resulted in the 5 June 1963 uprising. The bloody repression, and harsh reprisals which had followed, convinced opposition of all shades that the regime in place would not tolerate any kind of objection to its policies and method of governance.

Legal attempts by political organizations, such as the National Front and the Iran Freedom Movement, to uphold and enforce the Constitution had led to the arrest of their leaders and the dismantling of those organizations. Those who sought political change, especially the youth, saw little hope on the horizon. The soft-spoken and pragmatic leaders of the National Front, always conscientious of acting within the law, were forced to adopt the landmark policy of “patience and waiting” (*sabr o entezar*) on 9 February 1964. The equally legally minded leaders of the Iran Freedom Movement lingered behind bars. In the minds of the politicized youth, if the seasoned Mosaddeqist politicians could not reform the system, then perhaps the system was beyond reform.

Mehdi Bazargan, a Muslim social democrat and the founder of the Iran Freedom Movement, recalled that “the idea of armed resistance against the [post-Mosaddeq] coup regime took shape around the beginning of 1964.”²

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In Bazargan’s opinion, the shift in tactics, from peaceful and legal political dissent to armed struggle, followed “the repression of the last nationalist and religious attempts at legal resistance, the devastation and dispersion of the opposition, the defeat of the nationalist movement, and the elimination of the possibility of conducting a legal opposition movement”. In Bazargan’s political assessment from March 1964, “All opposition groups and organizations, with their differing ideologies, reached a single conclusion.” They agreed that “the

only means of struggling against the regime was through armed struggle.”³

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The eventless exile of Khomeyni in November 1964, which created no political ripples, was followed by a series of violent outbursts. Prime Minister Hasan-‘Ali Mansour was assassinated on 21 January 1965 by Mohammad Bokhara’i, a member of the armed branch of the Islamic Coalition of Mourning Groups. On 10 April 1965, an attempt was made on the Shah’s life at the Marble Palace, by Reza Shamsabadi. Finally, on 20 October 1965, members of the Islamic Nations Party were rounded up after clashing with the gendarmes in the hills around Darband. This party, led by Mohammad-Kazem Bojnourdi, was the first political group to enter armed struggle against the regime. According to Bojnourdi, “In the Shah’s undemocratic and police state, every move would have been severely repressed.” He concluded that “the response to the bayonet had to be with the bayonet.”⁴

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From the attempted insurrection of the Islamic Nations Party in October 1965 to the Siyahkal strike of February 1971, the radical opposition was seriously thinking about armed struggle. They discussed and studied it, formed an ideology, gradually constituted clandestine and semi-clandestine groups, and even engaged in military operations, without publicizing their identities. During those five years, on the surface everything seemed calm and quiet. The regime believed that the Shah’s White Revolution had won the hearts and minds of the peasants, workers, women, and middle class. True as this may have been, the opposition craved political freedoms, and the right to vocally disagree and organize.

The news of a military strike at Siyahkal on 8 February 1971 caught the regime by surprise. It marked the beginning of a Marxist–Leninist guerrilla war of counter-violence against the regime, with all its intended and unintended consequences. The armed activities of the guerrillas, even though they abated considerably after June 1976, continued through to the Iranian Revolution of February 1979.

To narrate meaningfully how seriously the activities of the guerrillas impacted the lives, outlook, and existential being of young, politicized, urban Iranians, it would not suffice to enumerate the operations carried out by them, and against them, tally their members and sympathizers, or count their dead and wounded.⁵

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The Iranian guerrilla movement, through its praxis established a frame of reference, an ethos and an archetype for Iranian political activists. It would be fair to say that its struggle and comportment established a code of conduct for the politicized youth. The battle conducted by the Iranian guerrilla movement captured the imagination of urban Iranians, especially its youth, and confronted them with important political questions on how to engage with authoritarian rule.

As soon as the news of Siyahkal had become public, all shades of the opposition, as well as Iranians concerned with the country's political gridlock, faced a new reality. A new answer had been provided to the question "What is to be done?" Armed struggle, an abstract and hypothetical option floating in Iran's political air, was now an option. In the face of public complacency, the young newcomers had taken it upon themselves to initiate regime change.

The fact that armed struggle was launched did not imply people flocking to it. Yet, the insurrectionary action of the guerrillas had created a personal, social, and ethical dilemma for those who believed that the regime denied them their constitutional rights. The taking up of arms by some must have weighed on the conscience of others who believed that the Shah's regime was dictatorial, exploitative, and a cog in the imperialist world order. For most of the opposition, irrespective of their decision to actively join the guerrilla movement, countering violence with violence seemed morally correct.

A large majority of the Iranian opposition opted to continue with their normal life, standing by to watch the battle between the armed guerrillas and the regime. In private, and in friendly circles, however, a significant segment of the silent urban majority rooted for the guerrillas. Sympathizers of armed struggle who could not join the guerrillas due to the high stakes respected the uncompromising stand of those who did. To many urban Iranian activists, the cause of the guerrillas was just, irrespective of their ideology. They were looked upon as the progeny of Iranian heroes in times of national desperation, Kaveh the Blacksmith, Babak Khorramdin, Ya'qub Lays-e Saffari, Hasan Sabbah, Sattar Khan, and Mirza Kouchik Khan. In 1978–1979, the mindset of insubordination cultivated by the guerrillas turned into full insurgency.

Joining the guerrilla movement remained the preferred choice of a special kind of political dissident. At a historical moment when few dared to challenge the powers that be, and even fewer rose to confront it, defiance and intransigence

were virtues passed on by the guerrillas to many young urban Iranians. By the late 1970s, the guerrilla movement had unintentionally cultivated its own underground folklore. In a closed and frightened society where information was strictly regulated, the guerrillas' exploits were overblown as the superhuman feats of heroes. Facts and rumour meshed to create wishful and laudatory narratives of an epic saga, part true and part fantasy. Grand tales of valour, gallantry, and true grit surrounded the activities of the guerrillas. Poems were written about their chivalry while songs were attributed to their selflessness. Hamid Ashraf, Ahmad Zibrom, Reza Reza'i, and Ashraf Dehqani, among others, became political and social symbols and role models. While high school and university students marvelled secretly at their exploits, the armed opposition acted out their dreams and fantasies.

The armed movement was responding to a sociopolitical need for self-respect and self-affirmation in a society where opposition to the regime had been villainized, discredited, and written off. The guerrilla movement became the awakened conscience of the opposition, the path to empowerment of the politically impoverished. The guerrilla initiative survived long enough to impose its political and psychological mark on society. As gun battles raged, and the regime relied more and more on arbitrary arrests, torture, summary trials, and executions, it alienated more students and people from all walks of life. The Shah's reaction to the unexpected guerrilla movement was that anyone involved with the "riots and the upheavals", be they involved with bloodshed or not, should face execution.⁶

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For five and a half years the guerrillas exposed the worst face of the regime.

From the moment the armed struggle began, the Shah was eager to minimize its importance by exuding a sense of confidence and projecting an air of calm and control. Any sign of distress by the Shah meant that the guerrillas had succeeded in shattering the image of the regime's uncontested power. On 17 June 1972, sixteen months after the assault on Siyahkal, Peter Ramsbotham, the newly appointed British Ambassador to Iran, betrayed the Shah's lofty air of poise and self-confidence. Ramsbotham wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, "The increased opposition and its new method of violence are worrying not only for the Shah but also for us." Ramsbotham drew a parallel between "the present situation" and "the days of the Mossadeq period". Yet, he quickly added that "we are a long way from the repetition of those events."⁷

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Asadollah 'Alam's diary entry of Tuesday, 14 August 1972 is most telling. The Shah's Court Minister wrote, "The terrorists have scared everyone."⁸

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After the Siyahkal assault, the Shah minimized the incident. In a speech, he quipped that stamping out the desperate, crazy, and sick exploits of a bunch of youngsters would not even require the services of the assistant cooks (shagerd ashpazha) in the army.⁹

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Time was to show that armed insurgency would last much longer than the Shah had anticipated, and that quelling it was not as easy as he thought. Every time the Shah was given a report on the activities of the Fada'is, their operations, arrest, or death in gun battles, his Majesty would ask, "What have you done about Hamid Ashraf?"¹⁰

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In May 1976, the Shah was furious about the news of demonstrations at Tehran University in support of the Fada'i guerrillas. He lashed out at 'Alam and said, "If you do not find all these saboteurs (kharabkaran), I will inflict a dire punishment on you (pedar shoma ra dar khaham avord)."¹¹

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More than seven years after Siyahkal, and two years after the death of Hamid Ashraf, the guerrillas continued to haunt the Shah. On 12 July 1978, anxious about their activities, the Shah told his new head of SAVAK, General Naser Moqaddam, that it had been a while since he had received a report about the terrorists. He enquired, "Is this because their activities have ceased or is it because SAVAK has not infiltrated them?"¹²

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Less than a month later, the Fada'i guerrillas attacked police forces at 'Eshratabad Square, and issued a declaration entitled, "This Is Our Response to the Brutal Killing of the Combatant People".¹³

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Notes

[1](#)

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A.K.S. Lambton, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 371 1641 86 EP 1015/125, 30 October 1962.

[2](#)

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M. Bazargan, Shast sal khedmat va moqavemat, jeld-e aval, Tehran: Rasa, 1375, p. 382.

[3](#)

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Bazargan, Shast sal khedmat va moqavemat, p. 382.

[4](#)

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K. Bojnourdi, Khaterat, Tehran: Daftar adabiyat-e enqelab-e eslami, 1378, p. 16.

[5](#)

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For some estimation of the numbers of combatants killed and imprisoned, including the Marxist guerrillas, see: E. Qane'ifard, Dar damgah tarikh, Los

Angeles: Ketab Corp., 2012, pp. 308, 314; E. Abrahamian, *The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977*, MERIP Reports, no. 86, March/April 1980; P. Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010, pp. 257–259.

[6](#)

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A.N. ‘Alikhani, *Yaddashthay-e ‘Alam*, vol. 2 (1349–1351), Bethesda: Iranbooks, 1993, p. 253. Hereafter referred to as ‘Alikhani. All references to ‘Alam’s diaries edited by ‘Alikhani are to the edition published in the US and distributed by Iranbooks.

[7](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/1881, NBP 1/3, “Terrorism in Iran”, 17 June 1972.

[8](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 2, p. 283.

[9](#)

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Keyhan, 20 Ordibehesht 1350.

[10](#)

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Qane'ifard, p. 248.

[11](#)

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'Alikhani, vol. 6, p. 113.

[12](#)

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Q. Hasanpour, Shekanjehgaran migouyand, Tehran: Mouzeh ebrat Iran, 1386, p. 84.

[13](#)

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M. Naderi, Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq, az nakhostin koneshha ta bahman 1357, vol. 1, Tehran: Moaseseh-ye motale'at va pajouheshha-ye siyasi, 1387, p. 828.

Violence as a Political Option?

The political and personal decision to take up arms against one's own government assumes the willingness to engage in violence, cause material damage, inflict injury, and if need be, death on one's own countrymen. To understand why in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the guerrilla movement erupted in Iran, certain suppositions are in order. From the point of view of a rational individual presenting no psychological predisposition to aggression, peaceful and non-violent methods of social and political change are assumed to be preferable to violent ones.

The young guerrilla opting to engage in armed struggle, knowing how short his/her life will be, makes a conscious decision to forego important life opportunities in terms of worldly pleasures. Once the choice is made, the revolutionary wearing an armour of certitude and conviction sets on a one-way path. The philosophy of life and mindset of such an individual is different from that of a typical pleasure-maximizer and pain-minimizer. The revolutionary also realizes that the political choice of going to war against a well-armed regime would have consequences, the most obvious of which is breaking with "ordinary livelihood" for an indeterminate period.

The guerrilla would have to come to terms with the eventuality of long periods of lying low, hiding in complete isolation, scavenging on the edges of society while being hunted down when organizational connections are ruptured, safe houses are compromised, and team members are killed in gun battles. The revolutionary knows that his/her endurance for both physical and mental pain,

even trauma, will certainly be put to the test. He/she will have to reconcile with an initial deep sense of remorse from injuring or killing a human being, even if it is the enemy.

The guerrilla would have to consider, and hypothetically overcome, the fear of injury, arrest, and imprisonment. He/she would have to be ready for something which is impossible to prepare for: excruciating pain inflicted by professional torturers who are not accountable to anyone. He/she would have to deal with the guilt and grief of being forced to divulge sensitive information, leading to the arrest, torture, and perhaps death of comrades. Finally, the revolutionary would have to make his/her peace with the eventuality of death in its multiple forms: in military operations, street fights, shoot-outs defending or escaping safe houses, under torture, by execution, or by swallowing the cyanide pill which the guerrilla always carries.

Taking up arms against a well-entrenched state results in shedding blood and taking lives. It invariably leads to a destructive cycle of violence, the heightening and intensification of police repression, and an even greater degree of arbitrariness and cruelty. The regime under siege usually responds by further limiting the few remaining political liberties, if any are left. Armed struggle threatens the forces of repression, and consequently increases their alertness and anger.

The authorities with a mandate to impose internal security will feel compelled to display their forces on the streets, punish the slightest semblance of anti-state activity, dissimulate their own fear, and reimpose their authority by sowing terror. Armed struggle militarizes society. The police state under attack widens the definition of acts of “terrorism” and “sabotage”, criminalizing what may have been acceptable before, causing physical pain to non-guerrilla dissidents for as much as reading “insurrectional works”.

The armed struggle, and its backlash, in a despotic regime, both intimidates and excites the silent majority. It estranges the silent majority from the repressive regime because of the brutality it exercises. Yet, it also estranges the silent majority from an armed movement in which they cannot engage, given the high costs of participation. The armed struggle and the state backlash produce a growing social stratum of sympathizers of different degrees impressed by the objectives and the comportment of the guerrillas. Armed struggle against despotism establishes moral authority for the revolutionaries, which the regime

cannot match, leading to increased sociopolitical polarity. Finally, the escalation of violence could lead to sociopolitical fragmentation and breakdown. The state could become dysfunctional and normal life could be interrupted. It could usher in a mass revolutionary movement.

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Demonizing the armed opposition

Given the hardship and pain involved with armed struggle, for both the individual and society, common sense dictates the choice of peaceful means of effectuating political change over violent ones. Politically evolved societies safeguard their political systems by institutionalizing democratic means and procedures to assure peaceful change. Those who may not agree with privileging peaceful over violent forms of political change could be considered as irrational beings or individuals with a strong proclivity towards violence. However, there is another social category composed of clear-headed human beings who have no proclivity towards violence yet opt for political violence under particular circumstances.

For this social category, the choice of violence is imposed on them by the despotic state, which blocks peaceful political change. The fact that the irrational or the homicidal social actor may opt for violence does not justify the easy conclusion that all citizens opting for political violence are irrational or homicidal. For the irrational or homicidal actor, the sociopolitical context and condition may have no impact on his/her decision to use violence. He/she could resort to violence irrespective of the political system in place. For the rational actor opting for armed struggle, his/her decision is entirely based on and dictated by the prevailing sociopolitical conditions created by the despotic state. Armed uprisings, irrespective of their specific historical background and context, cannot be attributed to psychopaths, terrorists, extremists, and anti-social agents. History has witnessed the use of violence by rational human beings as a means of political expression in the absence of politically responsive, transparent, and

accountable political systems.

One of the immediate aftermaths of the guerrillas' strike at Siyahkal was a concerted effort on the part of the regime to write off and belittle those involved in armed struggle. The popular Iranian daily Keyhan put forward a psychological analysis of the outbreak of guerrilla activities. It suggested that taking up arms was simply a passing fad. The behaviour of those involved was explained as a whimsical desire "to play guerrillas". To support its theory, the daily maintained that just as mini-skirts, maxi-skirts, and hot pants were fashionable, so were Herbert Marcuse, Régis Debray, George Habash, and Tran Van Don.

Echoing the Shah's contentions, Keyhan concluded that Iran was exposed to the international circulation of information like any other advanced country in the world, and could not be sheltered from the onslaught of these "fads".¹

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This was an attempt at minimizing armed struggle as frivolous, or a temporary craze which would quickly disappear over the horizon. The article did not present the guerrillas as irrational deviants, just impressionable consumers. In a more serious and systematic vein, however, the guerrillas associated with Siyahkal were characterized in the state-controlled press as immoral, inhuman, lunatics, traitors, murderers, saboteurs, mercenaries, thieves, bandits, savages, and perverts.²

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As clashes between the guerrillas and the security forces increased and intensified, the regime presented the gun battles as the natural outcome of the country's patriotic forces pursuing and neutralizing the "terrorists" that were cropping up all over the world. The press tried to normalize the situation by arguing that Iranians were perfectly at ease with recurrent scenes of the security forces gunning down those who had rebelled against the regime.³

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Iran was presented as an island of security, where the people lived in "peace, friendship and serenity" under the auspices of a "healthy and stable" regime. The sense of calm that permeated the country was argued to be rooted in the public's absolute faith in the vigilance of the security forces and the firm belief that the "terrorists" would soon be destroyed.⁴

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To guard against the people sympathizing with the cause of armed struggle, the security apparatus used the press to engage in a full-scale smear campaign. The character assassination of the guerrillas was peppered with psychological analyses. For months after the Siyahkal strike, the guerrillas were called juvenile gangsters, anarchists, terrorists, and social rejects, who had turned to murder and theft because of “mental deprivation, as well as personal and family failures and inadequacies” during their childhood. They were also accused of engaging in armed struggle because of personal greed, and a penchant for hatred, destruction, lawlessness, and aggressiveness.⁵

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As such they were presented as unstable criminals with sociopathic and psychopathic tendencies.

To denigrate the guerrilla movement, the press adopted a moralistic and sanctimonious position on gender mixing and sexual relations. In the thriving unchaste culture of big Iranian cities in the early 1970s, very much tolerated if not promoted by the government, the general public was familiar with images of scantily dressed women, promoting commercial products, films, romantic novels, and serials in newspapers, magazines, and on national television. In an almost voyeuristic vein, the press reported on the beauty of the women who lived in “terrorist” hideouts, elaborating on the sexual promiscuity of the “terrorists”, and positing that the guerrillas believed in “free love”.⁶

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To establish the deviant social, and individual behaviour of the revolutionaries, the “terrorists” or “saboteurs” were ironically charged with amassing personal wealth. They were accused of spending the monies confiscated during bank robberies for private gain, and the purchase of personal jewellery.⁷

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The list of conceivable vices attributed to the “terrorists” was almost complete when the press announced that heroin had been discovered at their hideouts. The authorities claimed that the “saboteurs” who had been arrested had testified that in order to assure the cooperation of some of their more reluctant accomplices, they injected them with heroin to secure their absolute compliance and obedience.⁸

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The term “terrorist”, as used by the government-controlled press and employed indiscriminately by government officials and the Shah, was meant as an invective. This was a label attached to the guerrillas to insult them. The term “terrorist” is usually applied to individuals who target innocent civilians with the object of intimidating the people. Terrorists use violence indiscriminately against defenceless ordinary people going about their lives. When students demonstrating on campuses, protesters marching on the streets, or workers striking in factories are attacked by the police and security forces, it is the state which targets specific civilian groups, and the state which commits intimidation and terrorism. The state which discards the constitution and prevents the peaceful rotation of power becomes illegitimate and rogue.

It could be argued that people have the right of interference when their state abuses their fundamental political rights. Objecting to wanton and systematic violence against political and social rights does not make terrorists, but protectors of the people’s rights. A guerrilla force is a segment of the population daring to challenge the intimidation tactics of an unlawful and unrepresentative regime. Guerrillas claim to choose their targets selectively, avoiding the infliction of pain on innocent civilians. Other than banks, they usually attack military, security, and selected economic targets, which they argue are accomplices in the repression of the people. The guerrillas firmly believe they are conducting a counter state-terrorism campaign.

The Iranian regime used the term “terrorist” to criminalize dissent in a non-democratic state. The term “terrorist” applied to guerrillas was intended to transform the oppressors into the victims and remove shame from criminal state acts, transferring guilt onto those who resisted state violence. In post-1971 Iran, the term “terrorist” became a catch-all genre applied to all “undesirable” and “subversive” elements agitating against the state. Soon after the Siyahkal strike, the Shah would address all dissident Iranian university students, at home and abroad, as terrorists.

To further demonize the armed opposition, it had to be coloured as foreign controlled. The regime insisted that they were pawns in the hands of sinister and foreign “black forces who were constantly plotting against Iran’s national interests”.⁹

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The origin of their “unpatriotic” and “treacherous” behaviour was traced to a set

of perverse and warped attributes. Diagnosed as “mentally ill” and “incapable of rational thought”, the guerrillas were pronounced to be “sick and pitiful”.¹⁰

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The regime accused the parents of these so-called “sick elements” of not having adequately attended to their children.

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Why resort to political violence?

The regime’s calumnies against the Iranian guerrillas hardly helped to explain their motives. Could all those who throughout history had taken up arms against tyranny, injustice, and arbitrary rule be categorized as sick terrorists and saboteurs? Can humanity’s incessant search for justice and freedom, often accompanied by violence, be disregarded and forgotten? What would the repertoire of human civilization look like without those who took up arms despite enormous odds, establishing exemplary norms of ethical conduct in the process? If it were possible to negotiate with various forms of despotic rule, why is history replete with hard-earned liberation and freedom through violent movements?

Slave revolts, spanning from Spartacus’s uprising in Rome (73–71 bce) to Nat Turner’s 1831 revolt in Virginia, USA, used violence to end a stark injustice. The peasant uprisings sweeping across every continent, except Australia and Antarctica, from 205 bce to 1994 (Zapatistas), were violent expressions of the exploited and the oppressed against the exploiters and the oppressors. The anti-colonial wars of liberation, from the American War of Independence in 1775 to the thirteen-year Angolan war which terminated in 1974, came to fruition through violence against the colonizers.

World history is replete with anti-despotic revolutions using violence, from the French Revolution of 1789 to the Arab Spring of 2011–2012. Could members of

the Spanish Republican Army, including the International Brigade, fighting against General Francisco Franco's dictatorship, or the French Resistance movement fighting fascism, be labelled as terrorists because they took up arms? Who would venture to call George Washington, George Orwell, André Malraux, or Jean Moulin terrorists? Faced with coercion, abuse, and debasement, sane, honourable, and upright people have been forced to resort to violence.

The Iranian Marxist guerrillas considered themselves neither irrational criminals nor anti-social psychopaths enamoured with the gun and fantasizing about gory scenes of torture, mutilation, and death. They did not regard themselves as lovers of death, or what Erich Fromm called necrophiliacs. On the contrary, the guerrillas believed that it was their love of a life free from political fear and humiliation which prompted them to opt for armed struggle. In their world outlook, rejecting submission to a life of political bondage was a liberating rather than a terrorist act.

The predominantly young Iranian university students turned guerrillas were willingly shouldering the burden of a society which understood the necessity of altering the political system but, for whatever reason, was not able to act on it. This new political breed of upright vigilantes considered themselves as self-appointed guardians of freedom, social justice and, most importantly, hope for a brighter future. To confront and defy the unchecked abuse of state power, which stood above the law of the land, the young revolutionaries believed it to be their social duty to take a stand and enforce a revolutionary law which they thought was fair.

The guerrillas displayed a self-righteous and paternalistic position, by taking it upon themselves to pursue the latent political will of the people, and act on their behalf. They found themselves in a conflicted position, walking in the shoes of their people, not ready to take the first step. They justified their stance by arguing that the awareness, sense of urgency, and energy of the masses had been inhibited and hampered by the regime's imposition of a police state. They, therefore, assumed their elitist responsibility as the vanguard, yet hoped to unleash the revolutionary mass momentum, by breaking the spell of intimidation and fear through military operations.

The guerrillas found themselves in a complicated situation: making revolution for and in the name of the people, without the people's firm support, and in hope of obtaining their active participation. The historical litmus test of their elitist

position rested on the inevitable response of the people. To absolve the presumptions and initiatives of the guerrillas, the people had to join the anti-regime struggle at some point. The people's refusal to join the anti-Shah movement would have proved the fallacy of their theories and the futility of their efforts and sacrifices. The guerrilla movement in Iran, as elsewhere, was inspired by Che Guevara's remark that "every day we must struggle so that this love of living humanity is transformed into concrete facts, into acts that will serve as an example, as a mobilizing force."¹¹

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Iranian guerrillas, therefore, had a dual perception of the people. Even though they revolted on their behalf and expected their assistance, they were dubious of the time when they would actively join them. The guerrillas were both needless and needy of the Iranian people. The intellectual revolutionaries turned guerrillas, with no prior fighting experience, were walking uncharted terrains.

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The four Iranian Marxist theoreticians of armed struggle

The pioneers of armed struggle firmly believed that the process by which they came to adopt their method of political expression was based on clear-headed reasoning. They did not, therefore, consider it as an ostentatious display of hubris. They all made a case for why armed struggle constituted the only logical means of effectuating any meaningful political change. The Marxist guerrilla movement in Iran had its own theoretical argumentation and framework. Bijan Jazani, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, Amir-Parviz Pouyan, and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh were four prominent names among what came to be known as the Cherikhay-e fada' i-e khalq (the people's self-sacrificing guerrillas). All four wrote pamphlets setting out their ideas on the necessity of armed struggle in Iran.

The impact of their works and their practice on the various phases of the guerrilla movement's formation varied considerably. Two of them, Jazani and

Zia-Zarifi, were arrested in January 1968, before they could participate in any military operations. Neither could experience how their theories would pan out in practice. The Siyahkal strike, marking the launching of armed struggle in Iran, occurred some three years after their arrest.

The major theoreticians of armed struggle in Iran of the late 1960s and early 1970s took great pains to explain how and why they had come to believe that the peaceful means of obtaining their sociopolitical objectives was made impossible by the Shah's regime. Bijan Jazani, born in December 1937, and Hasan Zia-Zarifi, born on 10 April 1939, were the archetypal representatives of the first generation of revolutionary intellectuals. When the 1953 coup succeeded, Jazani was almost sixteen and Zia-Zarifi was fourteen. By the time Allahyar Saleh relaunched the activities of the National Front in June 1960, Jazani was almost twenty-three and Zia-Zarifi was twenty-one.

This first generation to reflect on armed struggle had a fairly good memory of the events leading up to and after the coup. Jazani and Zia-Zarifi had a common life trajectory and luggage of experiences. They were both members of families with strong Tudeh Party affiliations and were themselves members of the Tudeh Party's Youth Organization. The two were also drawn to and sympathetic towards Mosaddeq's leadership of the oil nationalization movement and were disappointed with and disapproved of the Tudeh Party's passive stance on the day of the 1953 coup. They were both galvanized by the possibility of effectuating political change after the National Front re-entered the political scene. They became involved in National Front student politics and pinned their hopes on a peaceful road to change in the early 1960s. With the failure of the National Front to achieve any tangible results and the decision of its leadership to throw in the towel, they became disenchanted. It was against the backdrop of their common post-coup and post-National Front political experience that Zia-Zarifi and Jazani developed their rationale in support of armed struggle.

Whereas Jazani and Zia-Zarifi were born, respectively, in late 1937 and early 1939, the quintessential representatives of the second generation of revolutionary intellectuals and practitioners were some eight to nine years younger. Amir-Parviz Pouyan was born on 16 September 1946, and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh was born on 4 February 1947.¹²

▪

When Mosaddeq was removed from power, both Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh were

around seven. It is unlikely that they could have retained a vivid memory of the 1953 coup. Yet, they must have been marked by the prevailing aura of those days, or the repeated reminiscences of the grown-ups. Their writings, like those of Zia-Zarifi and Jazani, refer constantly to 1953 as the origin of the events which led to their decision to opt for armed struggle. The coup against Mosaddeq is viewed as the moment of the regime's delegitimization and illegitimation.

The resumption of the National Front's activities in June 1960 was almost concurrent with the reopening of the influential religio-political Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths, under the auspices of Mohammad-Taqi Shari'ati and Taher Ahmadzadeh in Mashhad. Both Amir-Parviz Pouyan and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh were around fourteen when they attended the Centre and participated in its Tuesday-night religio-cultural activities.¹³

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At this time, both youngsters were already politicized.

On Ashura, 24 June 1961, the Mosaddeqist and modernist religious Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths decided to organize a religio-political march rather than a religious precession (dasteh). The fifteen-year-old Amir-Parviz and Mas'oud were active in distributing pamphlets and carrying banners.¹⁴

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Some two years later, on 5 June 1963, still in Mashhad, they were both marked by the bloody events leading to the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeyni.¹⁵

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At the time, like many of their politicized school friends, they were sympathizers of the outspoken Ayatollah Khomeyni, who had single-handedly dared to challenge the authority of the Shah.¹⁶

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A review of these four individuals gives voice to their rationale for why armed struggle, their hypotheses, assumptions, exposition of historical facts, as well as the evidence presented to support their argument. Contrasting their political objectives with the means available to them, and the constraints facing them, provides a basis for evaluating the rationality or irrationality of their discourse. Their works will be presented based on the chronological order of their first

writings.

Notes

[1](#)

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Keyhan, 15, 16 Farvardin 1350.

[2](#)

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Keyhan, 21, 24, 25, Farvardin 1350; Ettela'at, 19 Farvardin 1350.

[3](#)

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Ettela'at, 5, 6 Khordad 1350.

[4](#)

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Khandaniha, 8 Khordad 2500 (1350).

[5](#)

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Ettela'at, 5, 6 Khordad 1350.

[6](#)

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Khandaniha, 15 Khordad 2500 (1350) and Ettela'at, 11 Khordad 1350.

[7](#)

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Ettela'at, 11 Khordad 1350.

[8](#)

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Ettela'at, 16 Khordad 1350.

[9](#)

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Ettela'at, 6 Khordad 1350.

[10](#)

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Ettela'at, 6 Khordad 1350.

[11](#)

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R.E. Bonachea and N.P. Valdés (eds.), *Che: Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970, p. 168.

12

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For Pouyan's birth date see: <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/2226/0/>

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(retrieved 9 October 2018). For Ahmadzadeh's birth date, I am indebted to Mastoureh Ahmadzadeh, his sister, who kindly provided me with a copy of Taher Ahmadzadeh's identity card, in which Mas'oud's date of birth is registered.

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Taher Ahmadzadeh, personal interview, January 1998.

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Taher Ahmadzadeh, personal interview, January 1998.

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'Ali Tolou', personal interview, March 2015.

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Tolou', personal interview, March 2015.

Hasan Zia-Zarifi's Account of Why Armed Struggle

In November or December of 1972, the Farsi language publishing house 19 Bahman printed an approximately 16,500-word treatise called The Jazani Group's Thesis (Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani). This important left publishing house based in London was dedicated to the propagation of the works of the Jazani Group. It was an almost one-person enterprise, directed and financed by Manouchehr Kalantari, Bijan Jazani's uncle, and one of the original founders of what came to be known as the Jazani Group. Having worked closely with the original inner circle of this group, Kalantari left Iran around April 1967 and took residence in London.

The authorless pamphlet The Jazani Group's Thesis contained two parts, with two distinct titles. The first part was called "The Problems of the Anti-Colonial and Liberation Movement of the Iranian People" (Masa'el-e jonbesh-e zedd-e este'mari va azadibkhsh-e khalq Iran). The second part was titled "The Main Responsibilities of Iranian Communists under Present Conditions" ('Omdehtarin vazaef komonisthay-e Iran dar sharayet konouni). The first part presented domestic and international developments after the 1953 coup. The second part began with a direct reference to the analysis set forth in the first part, then presented a sociopolitical assessment of the status quo and the potential revolutionary forces. It finally made a case for why and how armed struggle had to be launched.

It would be fair to assume that Kalantari had received this treatise from Tehran bearing neither name nor title. In London, Kalantari had crafted it into a

publishable piece. Naming the pamphlet The Jazani Group's Thesis, thereby placing the emphasis on Jazani, was Kalantari's doing. It is most likely that splitting the article into two distinct parts and giving each a title was also Manouchehr Kalantari's work. Even though in the introduction to the second edition, Kalantari pointed out that the pamphlet presented the ideas of the Jazani and Zia-Zarifi Group, he chose to entitle the treatise "Jazani Group's Thesis" and not "Jazani and Zia-Zarifi Group's Thesis".¹

▪

With regard to the authorship of the pamphlet, Kalantari intimated that this work was a group effort, reflecting the assessment and thoughts of the Jazani-Zarifi Group between 1965 and 1967. In 1975, after the execution of Jazani and Zia-Zarifi, Kalantari published another pamphlet called Jazani-Zarifi Group, Vanguard of Iran's Armed Movement. The pamphlet hinted that The Jazani Group's Thesis had been written by Zia-Zarifi and Jazani."²

▪

Despite suggestions that this work was a collaborative or group effort, it could be safely stated that The Jazani Group's Thesis was penned by Hasan Zia-Zarifi alone. Before the 1979 revolution, Kalantari had confided in Heydar Tabrizi that the pamphlet in question "was primarily ('omdatan) written by Hasan Zia-Zarifi".³

▪

According to Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, who was close to both Jazani and Zia-Zarifi, the latter was busy working on an article in 1965–1966. Based on his conversations with Zia-Zarifi at the time, Keshavarz-Sadr recalled that he was writing on imperialism, neo-colonialism, the post-coup political situation in Iran, and the pressing political problems in Iran. Back in the summer of 1964, at Zia-Zarifi's request, Keshavarz-Sadr accompanied him to Lahijan. On this trip he spoke to Keshavarz-Sadr about the favourable conditions for armed struggle in Iran. Zia-Zarifi informed his friend that he was seriously thinking about "a new movement with a new form".⁴

▪

A close textual comparison between Zia-Zarifi's "What Was I Saying" (written between 1968 and 1969) and The Jazani Group's Thesis (written around 1965–1966) leaves little doubt that both pieces were written by Zia-Zarifi. The two pieces of writing have a great deal in common. There exists considerable

resemblance, and even identity in these two works. The historical references, key ideas, analyses of events, expressions, chronological presentation of arguments, and even sentence constructions are almost the same.⁵

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It would be safe to assume that in his later text, “What Was I Saying”, Zia-Zarifi was drawing heavily on his memory of the piece he had written between 1965 and 1966, which later became known as The Jazani Group’s Thesis. Zia-Zarifi’s writing was probably used as a study document by the Group. During fall 1966, the Jazani Group was engaged in internal discussions on the possibility of armed struggle.⁶

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The culprit: Absolutist despotic monarchism

In his treatise The Jazani Group’s Thesis, Zia-Zarifi argued that after the 1953 coup, the Shah consciously and intentionally militarized sociopolitical life, relying ever more on the bayonet, violence, and repression. Zia-Zarifi posited that under the Shah’s “absolutist despotic monarchy”, all pretences to upholding the Constitution were abandoned, and the regime relied simply on the police and SAVAK. These repressive arms of the state were expected to “resolve” even politically unrelated everyday problems. SAVAK and the police, according to Zia-Zarifi, became involved with issues pertaining to culture, sports, education, and even public transportation.⁷

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Zia-Zarifi reasoned that the Shah’s regime did not and could not permit Iranians to enjoy democratic rights since respect for constitutionally approved political activities could culminate in the rapid mobilization of the opposition, and the weakening of the Shah’s rule.⁸

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In his analysis, the regime would not survive a day without the employment of “the bayonet and the whip”.⁹

▪

Whenever society pushed for its legal rights, Zia-Zarifi argued, the regime chose to use brute force rather than allow constitutional freedoms, thereby risking the demise of its rule. Zia-Zarifi posited that the regime opted to “close all democratic gateways”, and adopted a zero tolerance stance towards the opposition’s slightest activity.¹⁰

▪

He argued that the “intense and merciless repression that has prevailed in society” had correctly convinced the people that “resistance through peaceful means in the face of a gun-wielding and raving mad enemy would only result in setbacks and bitter hopelessness.”¹¹

▪

To conclude his argument, Zia-Zarifi drew upon his experience during the demonstrations and rallies of 1959 and 1962 when the regime experimented temporarily with limited political liberalization. He wrote, “The politicized urban strata have rightly understood that being smacked on the back of the head in the streets (tou-sari khordanha-ye khiyabani) cannot constitute the appropriate way of arriving at the objectives of the movement.”¹²

▪

Zia-Zarifi argued that due to the realities on the ground, armed struggle constituted the only viable and correct path to oppose the “Shah’s despotic monarchy”.¹³

▪

Armed struggle was the path to the revolution, and not the revolution itself.

For Zia-Zarifi, the absence of legal outlets for the expression of pent-up political frustrations, alongside the conviction that political change was necessary, necessitated the replacement of peaceful means of struggle with armed struggle.¹⁴

▪

In his assessment of power relations and the balance of forces in society, Zia-

Zarifi warned against too much pessimism and too much optimism when initiating armed action. He cautioned against the supposition that the regime had “unlimited divine powers”. Such ideas, he warned, were spread to inhibit the opposition. He also counselled prudence against minimizing the power of the regime, and wishfully expecting the “immediate folding of the regime’s military power”, as soon as armed struggle was launched. Zia-Zarifi reminded his readers that the regime would not crumble “with one political assassination (terror), blow or ambush”; nor would it be overthrown with “a one-day general uprising” (‘esyane ‘omoumi).¹⁵

▪

Zia-Zarifi posited that the creation of a “military front”, composed of armed revolutionaries against the Shah’s regime, was only “the beginning of a very long, obstinate, and incessant battle” involving “immense dilemmas, hardships and cruelties”.¹⁶

▪

In explaining the necessity of armed struggle, Zia-Zarifi drew a parallel between means and ends in democratic societies, as compared to despotic ones. In democratic societies, peaceful means of struggle, such as demonstrations, strikes, and rallies, mobilized and politicized the masses. Such actions propagated the message of the movement among the masses and prepared the conditions for people to embrace the revolution. In despotic societies, he argued, only armed struggle could prepare those conditions and mobilize the people.¹⁷

▪

In the absence of democratic conditions, Zia-Zarifi posited that the most immediate strategic objective of the revolution became, invariably, that of overthrowing the despotic monarchy of the Shah, through the appropriate tactic of violence.¹⁸

▪

Throughout his reasoning, Zia-Zarifi insisted that the key factor that rendered the peaceful method of struggle “absurd” and “meaningless” was the regime’s adamant insistence on denying the slightest political expression, even to the most conservative political strata of the movement. He restated his argument rhetorically and asked, “What can we expect of the passage of time, when the slightest public political action is prohibited?” Zia-Zarifi caustically addressed the Tudeh Party’s justification for shying away from radical action, by insisting

on the unavailability of the necessary revolutionary conditions. He lashed out at “the opportunists” and reminded them that given the prevailing political conditions, “We do not believe in miracles.”¹⁹

▪

The armed struggle which Zia-Zarifi proposed was one which included assassination, sabotage, attacks on military and security centres of the regime, and guerrilla warfare. Zia-Zarifi argued that armed struggle fulfilled numerous objectives. It provided political consciousness to the masses, awakened their revolutionary energy, and organized their resistance. It also destabilized the regime, unmasked it, and created the objective conditions for the alliance of anti-regime forces in and outside the country.²⁰

▪

▪

Reflections from prison

Zia-Zarifi’s later piece “What Was I Saying” was written for a particular purpose. This work was probably written between 14 February 1968 (his imprisonment) and 26 February 1969 (his final sentencing) or some four to five years after The Jazani Group’s Thesis. In it, he went back over his political life and explained why he had chosen the path of armed struggle. Zia-Zarifi asked three questions, which must have reverberated in the minds of many activists of his time: “What was I saying? What was the thesis or reasoning which landed me here? Were we a bunch of confused, crazy (mokhabat) and vainglorious (jouyay-e nam) youngsters without a plan and a theory, now doomed to spend the rest of our days in prison?”²¹

▪

Zia-Zarifi’s questions were intended as soul-searching jabs at himself and his comrades.

In this work, Zia-Zarifi provided the same basic description of the Shah’s regime

that he had presented in his 1964–1965 analysis. He, once again, traced the origin of the regime to the 1953 coup against Mosaddeq, and characterized it as an anti-democratic and despotic government, acting against the peoples' national interests (zedd-e melli).²²

▪

While the old sociopolitical problems lingered, he argued that new ones were added. In his analysis there was no sign of change in the regime's mode of interaction with the people.

Zia-Zarifi observed that the absence of effective political action by the opposition had left the masses in a state of paralysis, hibernation, and inertia, induced by fear and despair. He argued that despite the reforms (the Shah's White Revolution, with land reform at its centre), and a short period of liberalization, the regime relied consistently on "force" (zoor), and the "militarization" of social life to assure its rule.²³

▪

Zia-Zarifi referred to the regime's contemptuous reaction to 'Ali Amini and Mozaffar Baqa'i, who sometimes grumbled and criticized. He reasoned that the regime's intolerance of the political activity of its own loyal and docile subjects between 1960 and 1962 left the people's movement with limited alternatives.²⁴

▪

To break out of what he saw as a political deadlock, Zia-Zarifi assessed two possible options, the peaceful or the violent path. He suggested that during the past seven years (1962–1969), identifying the correct path had become an urgent matter.²⁵

▪

The leadership of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party, according to Zia-Zarifi, favoured the peaceful road. It argued that neither the objective nor the subjective conditions for the violent road were present. Zia-Zarifi suggested that for the Tudeh Party, the absence of strikes and open strife proved that Lenin's crucial prerequisites for a revolutionary condition did not exist in Iran. The impossibility of the ruling class maintaining their rule without any change, and the lower classes' inability to live in their old ways, constituted the two Leninist prerequisites for a revolutionary condition. In contrast to armed struggle, the Tudeh Party promoted syndicalist strategies such as pressing for the freedom of

labour union activities and higher wages. Zia-Zarifi argued that for the Tudeh Party, demanding an end to existing military alliances and some such generalities, constituted the proper method of struggle.²⁶

▪

In contrast to the Tudeh Party's promotion of peaceful strategies, Zia-Zarifi presented his own arguments in defence of violence. He argued that when the regime had responded to the demands of the university students for a reduction in tuition by either imprisoning them or sending them off to compulsory military service, talk of peaceful means could only be rooted in weakness and fear.²⁷

▪

Zia-Zarifi posited that the absence of sociopolitical struggles, or an oppositional movement, was due to the "unprecedented and violent despotism" which paralysed society. In the past fifteen years, he postulated, the masses had learnt that strikes and street demonstrations were incapable of yielding meaningful results, and this made them hopeless and passive. The masses, therefore, "needed a support to rely on to manifest their opposition". Zia-Zarifi concluded that "today, the masses are prepared to throw their ethical support behind those who are willing to respond to the bullet with the bullet."²⁸

▪

Zia-Zarifi believed that the masses were prepared to support the anti-regime movement. But this did not mean that they were ready to materially enter the fray. Yet to unleash the anti-despotic tidal wave, armed struggle had to be promoted. The revolutionary vanguard's military operations, he believed, would provide the terrified people with the needed prop. It would give them hope by shattering the silence and inertia. The revolutionaries would play, therefore, an important role in "completing and jump-starting the objective conditions of the revolution". Launching armed struggle, he argued, would eventually generate the objective and subjective conditions of the revolution. Zia-Zarifi wrote that under the political conditions that prevailed in Iran, armed struggle was not only of tactical use, but of "great strategic utility".²⁹

▪

In Zia-Zarifi's assessment, the conditions in Iran were such that any group who began armed struggle and succeeded in sustaining it, even if they were non-communists, would succeed in taking the leadership of the opposition. He believed that revolutionary action fostered the conducive circumstances for all

nationalist and anti-regime opposition forces to unite, forging a military united front.³⁰

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In a sober tone, Zia-Zarifi sketched his vision of the unfolding of armed struggle. He posited that even though the peasant masses were not close to a “condition of revolutionary explosion”, in the case of a clash between the people and the regime, the ruling class would not benefit from their support.³¹

•

The “urban forces” (nirouha-ye shahri), he maintained, constituted the most important initial prop for launching armed struggle. He considered them as more politically conscious, enlightened, progressive, and prepared.³²

•

Zia-Zarifi cautioned about “the major difficulties” of initiating and operationalizing armed struggle. He reminded future guerrillas that armed struggle required “enormous selflessness, attention, and perception”. The violent road needed to be launched by a combative “armed group” (nirou-ye mosallah) which constituted the axial force of guerrilla warfare (jang-e partizani).³³

•

To prevent the regime from isolating and concealing the insurrection, Zia-Zarifi suggested that as soon as the guerrillas launched a series of showcase operations, the people of the major cities, such as Tehran, needed to be informed of the commencement of the struggle.³⁴

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In a chilling anticipation of the future, Zia-Zarifi explained his insistence on leaving behind a clear trail of his thought process, lest he ended up “going straight from prison to the graveyard”. On Thursday, 17 April 1975, eight years after his arrest and imprisonment, and some six or seven years after his oracular statement, Zia-Zarifi was executed in the grounds of Evin prison.³⁵

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Notes

[1](#)

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19 Bahman, Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani: masa'el jonbesh-e zedd-e este'mari va azadibakhsh-e khalq Iran va 'omdehtarin vaza'ef komonisthay-e Iran dar sharayet-e konouni, Farvardin 1355, Chap-e dovom. Hereafter: Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani.

[2](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. alef; 19 Bahman-e Theoric, "Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi: pishtaz-e jonbesh-e mosallahaneh-e Iran", shomareh 4, Tir 1354, p. 107. Hereafter: "Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi".

[3](#)

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H. Tabrizi, Ravabet-e boroun marzi-ye sazeman cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran ta bahman 1357, Alman: Baqer Mortazavi, 2016, p. 73.

[4](#)

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Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, personal interview, 20 February 1997, Paris.

[5](#)

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See “What Was I Saying” (Cheh migoftam) in A-H. Zia-Zarifi, *Zendeginameh-ye Hasan Zia-Zarifi*, Tehran: Amin dej, 1382, pp. 266, 268. For a comparative analysis of the similarity between these two texts see: *Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani*, pp. 9, 10–13, 17–18, 28, 34–36, 40–42 and A-H. Zia-Zarifi, pp. 251–252, 255–256, 259–261, 266–269.

[6](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 261, 368–369.

[7](#)

•

Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 7.

[8](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 8, 31.

[9](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 17.

[10](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 8–9.

[11](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 28.

[12](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 28.

[13](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 30–31.

[14](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 42–43.

[15](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 41.

[16](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 41.

[17](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 42–43.

[18](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 29.

[19](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 42.

[20](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 42–43.

[21](#)

•

A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 251.

[22](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 251.

[23](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 265.

[24](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 266.

[25](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 266.

[26](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 267.

[27](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, pp. 267–268.

[28](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 268.

[29](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, pp. 268–269.

[30](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, pp. 270, 271.

[31](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, pp. 265–266.

[32](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 271.

[33](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 271.

[34](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, pp. 271–272.

[35](#)

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Ettela'at, 30 Farvardin 1354.

Amir-Parviz Pouyan's Account of Why Armed Struggle

Before writing his insurrectionary pamphlet on the necessity of armed struggle, Pouyan had tried his hand at a few literary works. Pouyan had an interest in literature as well as a taste and gift for it. While still in high school, he had a solid knowledge of Iranian literature.¹

Sometime around November/December 1969, the literary review *Faslha-ye Sabz* (the Green Seasons), well known among Iranian intellectuals and literati, published a piece called "Return to Utopia" (*Bazgasht be nakojaabad*).

In the review's table of contents, the piece appeared authorless, and its translator was acknowledged as "hamshahri", "fellow citizen" in English. Amir-Parviz Pouyan was the author of this political statement camouflaged as a literary piece. By 1969, Pouyan had made a name for himself as an up-and-coming writer in various literary journals and a participant in different politico-literary circles.²

He was also in touch with intellectual circles in the provinces, some of which were turning to Marxism for solutions to Iran's political problems.

"Return to Utopia" could be considered as a prelude to Pouyan's later work. Pouyan's account of the dialogue between the two Mexican characters was written in an allegoric style, typical of the critical literature published at that

time. The piece narrated two different views among the opponents of the regime. On one side of the boxing ring stood the radical revolutionaries, calling for action. On the other side stood the disgruntled intellectuals who believed in the palliative powers of verbal criticism. Pouyan knew that the content of his writing was subversive and used a large dose of metaphors and indirect representations to protect himself against the regime's censorship.

In Pouyan's account of this heated conversation, Emmanuel Arterey represented his own political ideas. Simon La Marte, Arterey's interlocutor, spoke on behalf of the Iranian literary giant of the time, Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Pouyan attributed to La Marte what he believed were Jalal Al-e Ahmad's political thoughts.³

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In this short story, Pouyan sought to demonstrate that unless discontent and grievance against injustice were translated into action against its perpetrators, those extolling freedom and liberation were singing lullabies, and subduing society instead of prodding it into liberating action. As if preparing for a final battle with the regime, Pouyan wished to close ranks. Progressive intellectuals who opposed the regime, yet found revolutionary action in Third World countries futile, needed to be convinced of the righteousness of armed struggle.

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Literature in the service of politics

In Pouyan's script, Emmanuel Arterey was a revolutionary Marxist, promoting change and freedom. He was full of hope for a better future. To him, human beings were the makers of history. They were "the creators of their own destiny and capable of creating better conditions for their livelihood". To Arterey (Pouyan), human beings were "conscious of their own condition and also cognizant of the need to change it". The unjust present was doomed to disappear despite those who wished to eternalize it. Freedom, on the other hand, "becomes a reality through historical determinism" and the "striving for a better future".

Simon La Marte (Al-e Ahmad), a famous writer, was portrayed as a pessimistic and nativist intellectual dissident, who believed that it was impossible to build a promised paradise on sterile soil. In the face of insurmountable odds, he promoted withdrawing from politics to protect one's personal integrity. In his scepticism and cynicism, La Marte dismissed Arterey's enthusiasm and invitation to bring about a revolution as "unrealistic". Pouyan wished to highlight the clash between an old, tired, and cautious generation of radicals, probably influenced by the Tudeh Party at some point in their lives, and a young, enthusiastic, and bold generation of revolutionary Marxists, determined to look out of the existing political box and move the earth.

La Marte (Al-e Ahmad) attributed the pursuit of three goals to Arterey: getting the people to revolt, bringing down the regime, and founding a socialist society. As if evoking Weber's concept of "instrumental rationality", La Marte argued that since Arterey's objectives were unattainable, revolutionary action became a "poetic" and "self-deceiving" concept. La Marte reminded young Arterey that "liberation from the bondage of metaphysics implied the denial of all concepts of paradise which does not and cannot exist." La Marte had lost faith in the possibility of revolution and the overthrow of the regime. He considered the pursuit of such a path as irresponsible utopianism.

To discuss the issue of failed revolutions, and the dilemma of taking up arms, Pouyan created a character called Pablo and made him the subject of one of La Marte's books. Pablo was a Mexican guerrilla fighter who had once launched an unsuccessful insurrection. According to La Marte (Al-e Ahmad), Pablo had failed because he wanted to attain something that could not be attained, his friends had betrayed him, and his enemies possessed overwhelming power and ingenuity.

The power of Pablo's enemies (read, Iranian regime), according to La Marte, resided in four factors. Having realized that it was no longer possible to govern in the same way as before, the regime had changed its old ways and was therefore successful in preventing insurrection. The army's power of repression was overwhelming and intimidating. Also, the regime benefited from the support of outside political powers, and at times of crises, it could rely on their assistance or even intervention. Lastly, the regime's political opposition was weak. According to La Marte, Mexico was not ripe for a guerrilla insurrection, and therefore Pablo should have chosen "a less catastrophic path".

Having presented the usual arguments against armed struggle, Pouyan made a case for the soundness of this method of struggle. In response to La Marte's charge of the impossibility of armed struggle, Arterey (Pouyan) argued that although it was a difficult task, it was not impossible. Faced with submission to an unjust and inhuman order, or revolting against it, Pouyan advocated an ethical calculation and choice. The justification for armed struggle rested upon its own intrinsic ethical value of overthrowing dictatorship, arbitrariness, and economic inequity. Pouyan tried to demonstrate the fallacy of the so-called invincibility and ingenuity of the regime, by arguing that had the regime been as ingenious as La Marte believed it to be, it should have been able to prevent Pablo's insurrection before it took place.

La Marte's (Al-e Ahmad's) supporters argued that since the masses lacked the necessary consciousness to become mobilized and take action, society could not be changed, and even if the revolution were to succeed, the masses would not be liberated as they lacked the political consciousness that was the prerequisite of liberty. Pouyan was presenting the classic Tudeh Party reformist and anti-revolutionary line of argument as a bogey, only to rip it apart.

In a second literary piece, called "Should We Return?", published in the same issue of *Faslha-ye Sabz*, Arterey (Pouyan) argued that political consciousness was not attained through a sudden or well-defined immersion experience. It was the outcome of a process. The liberating process of the armed struggle, Pouyan argued, could become the source of consciousness. Therefore, the fact that the masses did not possess political consciousness did not automatically repudiate the argument for revolutionary action. On the contrary, it justified the necessity of a revolutionary movement. The postponement of revolutionary action did not sit well with the younger revolutionary generation in full revolt against the Shah's regime.

In a short piece called *Khashmgin az amperialism, tarsan az enqelab* (Furious at Imperialism, Scared of Revolution), Pouyan engaged in another, yet this time open, critical appraisal of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's political stance. In this piece written after Al-e Ahmad's death in September 1969, Pouyan categorized him as "an anti-imperialist", and "a progressive and moderate petty bourgeois", "scared of the revolution", and "more scared of socialism than capitalism". Consumed by the righteousness of revolutionary action, and disappointed with liberal prodding, Pouyan accused Al-e Ahmad of "moaning and not roaring", "gently tapping, but not attacking". Yet he concluded that even though Al-e Ahmad was

not “in our ranks, he was not in the ranks of the enemy either”.⁴

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Armed struggle: Rational or irrational? A necessary theoretical digression

Pouyan was interested in refuting the common insinuation by sceptics of armed struggle that the guerrilla was motivated by irrational romanticism rather than rational realism. Pouyan argued that the Marxist revolutionary was acting realistically, reasonably, and rationally, and dismissed the notion that the guerrilla was an irrational and wide-eyed romantic, or simply a foolhardy and reckless adventurer. Based on a reading of his literary piece in Faslha-ye Sabz, and his other writings, Pouyan’s argument that armed struggle, in the context of Iran in the late 1960s and the 1970s, was a rational social action can be assessed by subjecting it to a Weberian analysis.

Pouyan would have most probably resented having his ideas framed and explained within a Weberian, rather than a revolutionary Marxist structure and methodology. There is no reason to believe that he had ever read or was familiar with Weber’s ideas. Pouyan did not directly address rational and irrational behaviour, yet it can be argued that grappling with such themes can be deduced from his writings. Since the issue at hand is to assess the extent to which armed struggle could constitute a rational act, clarification is sought in Weber’s standard classification of a variety of rational and irrational behaviours.

At the risk of engaging in truisms, a few basic tenets are in order. Political revolt to abolish despotism and systematic violation of human and political rights is in conformity with a notion of justice and a cluster of values connected to, and adjacent to it. The attempt to overthrow a political system, disrespectful of the peaceful transfer of power based on the people’s will, is ethically grounded. Faced with a regime’s repression of peaceful forms of protest, armed struggle becomes a viable option.

The alternative to armed struggle, for a politically conscious activist, is the tacit acknowledgement that a despotic regime is legitimate and acceptable. So long as the despotic regime remains despotic, it will continue to trample upon human rights and perpetuate injustice. Opting for non-violence would imply that fundamental transformations in the behaviour of the regime could be expected. Politically conscious activists could also opt for non-violence, as a result of a radical reordering and reshuffling of their ethical preferences and objectives, altering their priorities and rankings. They may argue that security and social peace takes precedence over human rights, even if it means living in a despotic society. A politically conscious activist may be a pacifist and a firm believer in non-violence. In this case the degree to which human rights and political freedoms are upheld or trampled upon by a regime would not impact his decision to take any other road but non-violence. The argument that revolutionary inaction emboldens and helps perpetuate the rule of despotism, prolonging the hardship and suffering of the people, does not impact the decision of the pacifist, irrespective of his degree of political consciousness.

If opposing despotism and political injustice is considered of ethical value within itself, then those engaging in anti-despotic acts, irrespective of their prospects for success, would be behaving according to the Weberian classification of a “value-rational” conduct. Value-rational action is grounded in ethical norms, such as compassion, solidarity, empathy, mutual assistance, altruism, friendship, and justice. Weber differentiates between a value-rational social decision-making process, and those actions which are based on irrational traditional actions, or affectual actions. Actions of this type are based on, for example, daily and routine acts such as passion, rage, revenge, depression, or romanticism. Value-rational action is distinguished by the “clearly self-conscious formulation of the ultimate values governing the action, and the consistently planned orientation of its detailed course to these values”.⁵

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What distinguishes value-rational social action from the affectual type is that the former requires reflection, “self-conscious formulation of the ultimate values governing the action”, and constant assessment of its course in relation to its values.⁶

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Weber suggests that “the actions of persons who regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into place their convictions” constitutes an example of

pure value-rational orientation.⁷

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In his classification of rational acts, Weber identifies a second type of rational social action. An instrumentally rational act is one which is based on the expectation of successfully attaining a well-defined end.⁸

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Weber defines instrumentally rational action on the basis of a well-thought-out assessment of expected reactions to a given social act, and the degree to which those anticipated responses would hamper, or advance, the end objectives. Instrumentally rational acts would qualify as such if a comparative and calculated analysis is undertaken, evaluating the means and resources available to act in relation to expected ends. A behaviour based on assessing the means in view of the end or a strategic cost-benefit analysis is, therefore, considered as an instrumentally rational act.

According to Weber, “Action is instrumentally rational when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed.”⁹

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This type of action involves “rational consideration of alternative means to the end”, the rational consideration of “the relations of the end to the secondary consequences” and, finally, the rational consideration of “the relative importance of different possible ends”.¹⁰

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Identifying, and then assessing objectives, alternatives, and consequences, with an eye to finding the most efficient way of obtaining the desired outcomes constitutes the framework of Weber’s instrumentally rational action.¹¹

▪

Once a choice, based on a set of preferences, is made among available options, the instrumentally rational social actor will follow the strategy which has the greatest chance of success, thus moving towards the attainment of preferred objectives. The guerrilla remains steadfast in his choice, even though the attainment of his objective may cost him his life. In this case, the guerrilla’s sense of social responsibility and his valuation of political liberation, compassion, and justice outweighs his desire for self-preservation under

conditions of debasement and oppression. Among those whose sense of self-preservation, under any and all conditions, prevails over all other objectives, or those who believe that taking up arms would not lead to the objective of shedding tyranny, the instrumentally rational choice would be to avoid armed struggle. Therefore, both those who opt for the violent and the non-violent road to change could be considered as instrumentally rational.

The instrumentally rational social actor is supposed to be conscious of the secondary results of his action. In the process of realizing his well-identified cluster of values, the guerrilla is conscious of the possibility of his own death, as well as that of others. What may seem to others as an act of self-sacrifice, or a murderous act of terrorism, for the guerrilla is a rational behaviour in pursuit of the successful attainment of a preferred political objective. In opting for armed struggle, given the realities on the ground, the guerrilla, as a socially embedded actor, is engaging in a rational process of calculation and cost-benefit analysis, specific to the guerrilla's subjectivity.

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Pouyan on the necessity of armed struggle as a rational choice

In late April and early May of 1970, Amir-Parviz Pouyan wrote a treatise entitled *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Theory of Survival* (Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh va radd-e teori-e baqa). Pouyan went underground probably some five months later, around September 1970.¹²

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Pouyan's writing on *The Necessity of Armed Struggle*... incorporated many of those ideas he had broached in a veiled manner in his literary pieces in *Faslha-ye Sabz*. Pouyan's pamphlet, along with Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic* (Mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, ham estrategy, ham taktik), occupies a singular position in the Iranian annals of revolutionary

Marxist literature. It would be fair to say that no other work in Farsi was as influential as these two in attracting university students to armed struggle.

Both texts were written to reason and convince, as well as to stir and incite the youth to join an insurrectionary movement against the regime. They were not written as interpretative, non-value judgemental, and scholarly pieces in the peace and quiet of a library, or some such environment. Penned in an environment of fear, pressure, and danger, these works were subjective, goal-oriented, often polemical, peppered with emotional invocations and ideological postulates, to convince the youth of the necessity of armed struggle and how to battle “the enemy”. These two writings jolted into action Iranian intellectuals and university students.

In his short treatise of approximately five thousand words, Pouyan provided an antagonistic picture of the relation between the Iranian regime of 1970 and its subjects. He argued that the regime maintained its rule through repression, coercion, and persecution. In his analysis, Pouyan enumerated the areas and instances where the people seeking to exercise their basic constitutional rights and freedoms were subjected to wanton injustice and abuse by the regime, which he referred to as “the enemy”.

In the aftermath of the 1953 coup, he contended, a police state was installed to control and scrutinize all centres of socio-economic activity.¹³

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Pouyan maintained that factories, irrespective of their size, were under the control of SAVAK, and any attempt at organizing strikes was harshly repressed, with those involved arrested, fired, and sometimes tortured. He contended that employment in public and private sector enterprises was contingent upon a thorough background check and clearance by SAVAK. Travelling from urban centres to rural areas, he claimed, was subject to close surveillance, and in many geographical areas, the presence of non-governmental newcomers was reported to the authorities. Finally, Pouyan ascertained that political dissidents, especially Marxists, were routinely hunted down by the police.¹⁴

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Pouyan posited that “the enemy” used any and all tactics available to it to repress the combative opposition and create an atmosphere of “terror and repression”. This “fascist dominion of the representatives of imperialism”, he argued, had

made “any direct and continuous relationship or contact” between the revolutionary intellectuals and the people very difficult.¹⁵

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According to Pouyan, “the complete absence of democratic conditions” added to the people’s general sense of “fear and oppression”, and kept the masses isolated from revolutionary intellectuals.¹⁶

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Pouyan argued that the stratagem of preventing any meaningful political contact between the masses and their vanguard had two consequences. First, it isolated the people from the revolutionary intellectuals, rendering “any propaganda work” to raise political consciousness among the masses extremely difficult. The forced separation between the masses and revolutionary intellectuals perpetuated the people’s ignorance about their own political potentials and capacities. Second, the state-imposed segregation facilitated the succumbing of the masses to the depoliticized hegemonic culture propagated by the regime. According to Pouyan, the regime sought to preoccupy the people with “vulgar petty-bourgeois pastimes”, thereby weakening their resolve to oppose the regime.¹⁷

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Keeping the people apart from revolutionary intellectuals aggravated the fear and aversion of the masses towards any kind of political action.

Pouyan presented the reason why the masses did not revolt against their inhuman and unjust conditions in a simple and straightforward formula. He posited that the masses, and in particular the working class, “considered the power of their enemy as absolute” while they were equally and absolutely convinced of “their own inability to liberate themselves from the dominion of the enemy”.¹⁸

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Belief in the veracity of this crippling “double-absolute theorem” prevented the masses from striving for, and attaining a free and emancipated society.

For Pouyan, overthrowing the enemy’s fascist, oppressive, exploitative, and non-democratic state, bent on chasing, repressing, and eventually killing political opponents, was a consciously formulated plan. Furthermore, his reasoning behind the overthrow was based on a constellation of ethical preferences. As such, Pouyan’s call to action was value-rational as well as sociopolitically

embedded in revolutionary Marxism.

Pouyan believed that by challenging the “double-absolute theorem” through concrete political action, the revolutionary vanguard could demonstrate its fallacy, enabling society to “think about liberation”. As long as these crippling double-absolutes remained undented in people’s mind, the revolutionary intellectuals could not succeed in establishing a meaningful relation with the people. In isolation, the working class would fail to become politically conscious. Unhampered, the oppressive police state would continue its dominion.¹⁹

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To tear down the psychological barriers preventing society from thinking about liberation, the revolutionary vanguard had to take up arms.

Focusing on the initial objective of the guerrillas, Pouyan maintained that the employment of “revolutionary force” could attain four objectives. It constituted a means of propaganda for the cause and could “destroy the proletariat’s image of absolute impotence”. The armed struggle could endow the proletariat with class consciousness, attracting them alongside the intellectuals and students to the movement, thus ensuring the victory of the ongoing struggle.²⁰

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To explain the reasoning behind his call to arms, Pouyan provided an assessment of the sociopolitical status quo, and why it was untenable. He distinguished between the two successive ends of the movement. First, enabling the masses to “think about liberation” before dismantling the tyrannical state. Pouyan discussed the alternative means of changing the regime, namely the effectiveness of the peaceful and legal means, and finally engaged in a comparative assessment of the individual and sociopolitical costs of opting for armed struggle.

Pouyan argued that the use of “revolutionary force” would aggravate “the brutal repression” of the police. The escalation in the intensity of police repression, a side effect of guerrilla activities, Pouyan argued, would in turn increase pressure on all social classes, heightening the contradictions between the persecuted classes and the regime. In his analysis, this exacerbation of hardship would help to increase the people’s political consciousness by leaps and bounds, while concurrently unmasking the “savage” essence of the regime.²¹

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What Pouyan could not predict was the degree to which the regime's persecution would turn world public opinion against it, playing an important role in its demise.

Once the armed struggle was initiated, Pouyan believed that every successive blow against the enemy would have two consequences. First, the regime would become vulnerable and suspicious of everyone, except its trusted allies. The insecure enemy would lash out indiscriminately against any sign of discontent, "imprisoning, torturing, and setting up firing squads in the hope of returning to the by-gone state of security". Second, the psychological impact of successive blows against the regime would shatter its invincible image, emboldening the masses to actively participate in the revolutionary struggle.²²

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Pouyan entertained the possibility that escalating repression could scare away the masses from joining the movement. In his analysis, however, launching the guerrilla movement and the backlash of the regime's brutality would further attract people to the ranks of the anti-regime movement. Intensified repression, according to Pouyan, would not deter the masses, but on the contrary would reduce their tolerance towards the regime and make them more belligerent.²³

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Pouyan also considered the consequences of heightened police repression against the guerrillas. The launching of armed struggle, he argued, would subject the revolutionary forces to more intense and ruthless campaigns of surveillance, monitoring, tracking, detection, and annihilation. To resist the blows and prevent disintegration and collapse, Pouyan predicted that the "revolutionary forces" would "draw closer to one another".²⁴

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Overall, in Pouyan's evaluation, even though the state would inflict considerable suffering and pain on the people, the consequences of armed struggle would eventually strengthen and not weaken the anti-regime movement.

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Refutation of the theory of survival

Pouyan's objective of promoting armed struggle went hand in hand with his denunciation of those who argued that, to avoid the wrath of the regime, political activists should not provoke it. He rejected the promotion of political quietism for the purpose of protecting and safeguarding members and organizations as politically unacceptable and ethically reprehensible. Pouyan's prime targets were Marxist–Leninist groups and organizations who were making lofty claims about the revolutionary transformation of society while placing their primary emphasis on their own self-preservation and survival. Having reminded them of their sociopolitical responsibility to galvanize and bolster the revolutionary movement against the enemy, Pouyan labelled those advocating self-preservation as “self-defeatists” and “opportunists”.²⁵

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To Pouyan, the idea of protecting a political group with revolutionary objectives from the regime's assault, by promoting non-revolutionary acts and condemning armed struggle, was irrational. The desired goal of changing the regime needed to be aligned with the type of social action and method of struggle which could realize it. Pouyan claimed that it was impossible to reduce one's “revolutionary responsibilities” to the point of “avoiding any kind of clash with the police” and still hope to galvanize the anti-regime struggle.²⁶

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Overthrowing the regime required confronting it. Pouyan's argument for armed political action was not only value-rational, but instrumentally rational.

In his analysis of the alternative means available to the revolutionary forces, Pouyan criticized the theory of “let us not attack in order to survive”. This position was at the time commonly associated with SAKA (Communist Revolutionary Organization of Iran) and the Tudeh Party of Iran. He mocked their position, which boiled down to enabling the police to destroy them “in the womb” without putting up any resistance.²⁷

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To Pouyan, studying Marxist literature in small clandestine circles and continuing one's peaceful life without any meaningful attempt at changing the

status quo, while waiting for the “right moment” and the “appropriate conditions” was an “opportunistic” excuse born out of paralysing fear.²⁸

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Pouyan argued that non-aggression by organizations with revolutionary goals was a rash and self-defeating decision. Organizations with revolutionary claims, irrespective of their posture and behaviour, combative or peaceful, were considered as “dangerous embryos” by the regime. They would sooner or later become the target of annihilating attacks. He concluded that there was nothing more pleasing to the enemy than organizations with revolutionary objectives which became “harmless prey” by sitting in their bunkers, waiting, and not firing on the enemy, thinking that their non-aggressive attitude would guarantee their survival.²⁹

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Pouyan posited that the “right moment” and “the appropriate conditions” were not abstract excuses conjured whenever so-called revolutionary groups needed to justify their inactivity. The “right moment”, he argued, would present itself if “revolutionaries at all times during their struggle were ready to respond appropriately to historical necessities”.³⁰

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Pouyan believed that it was the job of intellectual revolutionaries, whom he considered as the vanguard of the people, to create the appropriate conditions through armed struggle.

Pouyan concluded his explosive pamphlet by replacing the dictum of “let us not attack in order to survive”, with “in order to survive we are obliged to attack”.³¹

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The absence of a classical Marxist–Leninist “revolutionary situation”, he believed, was not a reason for the vanguard to go into hibernation. On the contrary, it was the prime reason why it had the obligation to go on the offensive, strike out against all odds, as it had no other alternative. For him, the subjective conditions, which the revolutionaries could alter, were more important in determining the outcome than the objective conditions over which they had no control. The “revolutionary situation”, in Pouyan’s estimation, needed the midwife of revolutionary intellectuals, the guerrillas.

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Pouyan's incisive impact

From around the end of spring 1970, Pouyan's thunderous treatise, sometimes called the "Spring Pamphlet", was reproduced clandestinely, and secretly exchanged hands. The work was handled by university students as if it were a contraband good. The recipients would tuck it away in their coats or carry it in a well-protected envelope.³²

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Those who came across this work have vivid recollections of its impact.

Naqi Hamidiyan was a member of 'Abbas Meftahi's Marxist–Leninist group in Sari, Mazandaran. The group had been operating as a study circle since 1966. Hamidiyan recalled having received Pouyan's pamphlet in the spring of 1970, almost as soon as Pouyan had finished writing it. Pouyan's "eloquent pen", he remembered, jolted the activists in his group, and fostered a rebellious mood among them. For Hamidiyan's group, the pamphlet constituted a "practical project" for the ultimate establishment of a working-class party through the expansion of clandestine revolutionary groups, and their eventual alliance. A few months later, after having received Ahmadzadeh's pamphlet in September 1970, Hamidiyan's group abandoned the idea of founding a working-class party. The pamphlet had a similar impact on other groups.³³

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In December 1970, Asghar Izadi was a student at the Agricultural School of Tabriz University. He received Pouyan's treatise from Asadollah Meftahi, 'Abbas Meftahi's brother. By this time, Izadi had studied classics, such as Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* and *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. Before accepting armed struggle, in his circle with Asadollah Meftahi, Izadi was thinking of creating a Marxist–Leninist party. He recalled that Pouyan's treatise helped him accept the armed struggle path. It

explained why it was necessary to replace the political project of founding a Marxist–Leninist party, as a prerequisite for the revolutionary movement, with armed struggle. Izadi later participated in a military operation before being arrested.³⁴

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Mostafa Madani remembered having received Pouyan's pamphlet from Mostafa Sho'a'iyān, before the Siyahkal attack of 8 February 1971. After the 1979 revolution, Madani became a member of the Fada'i Organization's Central Committee, and ran unsuccessfully for the Assembly of Experts, and the first post-revolution parliament, on a Fada'i ticket. Having read the pamphlet, the twenty-four-year-old Madani felt as though Pouyan had been in his own head and privy to his own intimate theoretical odyssey. The treatise presented him with a solution to get out of the political cul-de-sac he was in. Pouyan's work dispelled his doubts and confirmed his convictions.³⁵

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Somewhere around 10 March 1971, Pouyan's pamphlet was handed to the twenty-one-year-old Qorbanali (Majid) 'Abdolrahimpour, a student at Oroumiyeh University. From 1977, 'Abdolrahimpour became one of the three members of the Fada'i guerrillas' leadership team, and after the revolution he became a member of the organization's Central Committee. 'Abdolrahimpour has a vivid memory of the night he received Pouyan's pamphlet. Behrooz Armaghani lent him the pamphlet at night and asked him to return it the next morning. The catchy title of the pamphlet, *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Theory of Survival*, swept away sleep from 'Abdolrahimpour's drowsy eyes.³⁶

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After a long and hard day, the more he read, the more he found the content of Pouyan's work in tune with his own thoughts. Pouyan's ideas perfectly resonated with the ideas of his political group.

Pouyan's pamphlet was the clear, loud, and inspirational expression of the deep-felt intuition and sincere aspiration of many young political activists of his time. 'Abdolrahimpour's account of how Pouyan's narrative echoed his own thoughts closely resembles Madani's description of his exposure to this pamphlet. To these young men, as to numerous others who came across Pouyan's pamphlet throughout Iran, this revolutionary manifesto was totally transformative. It was a

life-changer. To the politically active university students of the academic year 1970–1971, Pouyan's work was a treasure trove of answers to their enquiries on what was to be done. From the next day on, having returned the pamphlet to Behrooz Armaghani, 'Abdolrahimpour recalled that Pouyan's thoughts became the guide to his actions in the political domain.³⁷

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Sometime during the spring of 1971, Ebrahim Pourreza'i-Khaliq, a twenty-five-year-old mechanical engineering student at the prestigious Ariyamehr University of Technology, confided in a friend that he had become so fond of Pouyan's pamphlet that, after having read it repeatedly, he had come to know it almost by heart. Ebrahim Pourreza'i-Khaliq later joined the Fada'i guerrillas, became a key figure in the armed organization, and was killed under torture at age twenty-nine.³⁸

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According to Behzad Karimi, in their political circle at Tabriz University, all discussions and lingering doubts about the veracity and primacy of armed struggle dissipated after they studied Pouyan's pamphlet. It was Ebrahim Pourreza'i-Khaliq who brought them a copy of the pamphlet from Tehran.³⁹

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Pouyan's pamphlet, *The Necessity of Armed Struggle...*, was not only a fresh, short, and easy read, but it was also provocative and insurrectionary. Pouyan's passionate, intense, and stirring message urgently and convincingly called on the frustrated educated youth, disgusted with the apathy around them, to rise, act, and take up arms. It was intended to arouse and impel. It did just that.

Notes

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Ne‘mat Mirzazadeh, personal interview, 18 March 2015, Paris.

[2](#)

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F. Sarkouhi, Yas o das, Sweden: Baran, 2002, pp. 12, 14.

[3](#)

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Faslha-ye Sabz, no number, no date. This is the second issue of this literary review. While the first issue of this publication was registered on 11 December 1968, this second issue has no date. Based on a few pieces in this issue with dates, it was probably published around November or December 1969 or a year after the first issue. I am grateful to Shahram Qanbari for his help to sort out this date.

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A-P. Pouyan, Khashmgin az amperialism, tarsan az enqelab, Italy: Majma‘ daneshjouyan Irani dar Italia havadar-e cherikha-ye fada’i-e khalq, n.d., pp. 10–12, 14.

[5](#)

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M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, p. 25.

[6](#)

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Weber, p. 25.

[7](#)

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Weber, p. 25.

[8](#)

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Weber, p. 24. Weber's definition of "instrumentally rational" action.

[9](#)

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Weber, p. 26.

[10](#)

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Weber, p. 26.

[11](#)

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The pursuit of individual self-interest in the form of maximizing consumption or profit is but one of the spin-offs of Weber's instrumentally rational social actions. In our analysis, the social actor is not a self-interested individual outside society but firmly embedded in society, seeking sociopolitical objectives.

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This inference is based on the approximate date when Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Pouyan's close comrade-in-arms, decides to terminate his obligatory military service at the air force garrison in Tehran and informs his father, Taher Ahmadzadeh, through a letter, that he has decided to leave Iran. The letter reaches Taher Ahmadzadeh in Shahrivar 1349 (August–September 1970). Taher Ahmadzadeh, personal interview, January 1998.

[13](#)

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A-P. Pouyan, *Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh va radd-e teori-e baqa*, 3rd printing, Sweden: Gorouh-e entesharati-e Bijan Jazani, n.d., pp. 27–30. Hereafter: *Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh*.

[14](#)

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Pouyan, *Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh*, pp. 27–30.

[15](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 26–27.

[16](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 28.

[17](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 28–29.

[18](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 31.

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 31, 32.

[20](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 33, 34.

[21](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 36–37.

[22](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 36–37.

[23](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 37.

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 36.

[25](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 38.

[26](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 41.

[27](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 38.

[28](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 40–41.

[29](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 42.

[30](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 40, 41.

[31](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 45.

[32](#)

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Shahram Qanbari recalled having received Pouyan's pamphlet in November 1970 and Ahmadzadeh's pamphlet in January 1971, personal interview, 15 May 2018.

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N. Hamidiyan, *Safar bar balha-ye arezou*, Stockholm: Arash, 2004, pp. 57–60. The exact same process of renouncing a workers' party occurred with Changiz Qobadi's group. See B. Qobadi, *Adamha-ye siyasi*, unpublished manuscript, 1387, chapter one (Bahram), pp. 21–22. I received this manuscript from 'Abdollah Gavami through Farhad Nomani.

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Asghar Izadi, personal communication, 9 May 2019.

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Mostafa Madani refers to both summer of 1970 and fall of 1970 before the Siyahkal attack as the dates when he received the article by Pouyan. See M. Fathi and B. Khaliq, *Bazkhani-e jonbesh-e fada' iyan khalq-e Iran*, n.p.: Sazeman-e ettehad-e fada' iyan khalq-e Iran, 1389, p. 107; Mostafa Madani, *Toufan-e enqelab ejazah ta ' ammoq bar bon-bastha-ye rah ra be fa' alin jonbesh-e mosallahaneh nadad*, Kar Online, <http://www.kar-online.com/node/7515>

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(retrieved 1 June 2018).

[36](#)

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Majid ‘Abdolrahimpour in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 214; ‘Abdolrahimpour, personal communication, 26 September 2019.

[37](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 215.

[38](#)

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Behzad Karimi in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 182.

[39](#)

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Behzad Karimi in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 183.

Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's Accounts of Why Armed Struggle

While Pouyan's work stirred, convinced, and fomented rebellion, it was Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's methodical style and mathematical mind which provided Iran's politicized university students with a revolutionary Marxist guide to action. His work was neither easy nor an electrifying read. It simply argued in detail why armed struggle was the only tactical and strategical option for the overthrow of the regime. The works of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh written in the spring and late summer of 1970 transformed the political culture and outlook of student activists in Iran. The two works gave voice, justification, and direction to an insight or a hunch that simmered below the surface. By the academic year 1971–1972, a growing number of student activists at Tehran University, and across all Iranian universities, believed in the principle of armed struggle as the single effective method of struggle against the regime.¹

The impact of the works by Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh was not only in its affirmation of armed struggle, but also in its refutation of dilly-dallying with political and guild methods of opposition and struggle. Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh had effectively buried the idea that meaningful struggle could be carried out by political and trade union activities. In light of their writings, and subsequent to the Siyahkal strike, the term political activist/worker (*siyasi kar*), or someone primarily or purely interested in engaging in political, cultural, and guild activities to further the cause of the movement, became a pejorative word. It came to identify those who placed their survival ahead of bringing down the

Shah's regime. Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh were responsible for the strict demarcation between Marxists who believed in struggle through political activism (siyasi kari) and those who believed in the armed path (mash-ye mosallahaneh).²

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To Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh, the two methods were mutually exclusive, an either/or condition.

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Demystifying classical notions of how and when to take up arms

Both Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh knew that Lenin had firmly established "the fundamental law of revolution", and that according to it, "Only when the 'lower classes' do not want the old way, and when the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way – only then can revolution triumph."³

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They were also aware that Lenin had emphasized that a majority of workers "should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it".⁴

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They were furthermore cognizant that none of those conditions existed in Iran. Yet, as Ahmadzadeh was to point out, revolutionary Marxists were not willing to accept inaction which prolonged the undemocratic state simply because they were bound by a set of sociopolitical generalizations and rules set by the revolutionary forefathers and predecessors.

Ahmadzadeh pointed out that changes in world conditions, since Marx and Engels had written about revolution, compelled Lenin to introduce the concept of the vanguard organization as the prerequisite of a successful revolution.

Ahmadzadeh pointed out that, as the revolution swept across the East, the role of the vanguard organization became more pronounced.⁵

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Different times, places, and conditions necessitated different approaches. Had not the specific conditions of China compelled Mao to rely on the peasant masses, whom Marx did not consider as a revolutionary class?⁶

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Moving to a different time and place, Ahmadzadeh argued that, based on the Cuban condition, Castro maintained that, even though a vanguard organization was necessary to lead the revolution, it did not need to be the Marxist–Leninist party.⁷

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Ahmadzadeh postulated that in Iran, neither the working class nor the peasants were in a revolutionary situation. So, if there was to be a revolution, the armed vanguard would have to be composed of revolutionary intellectuals. Previously, however, the leadership of a revolution by intellectuals had not been theorized, recognized, or sanctioned.

In Russia, Lenin had abandoned waiting for Marx's predicted development of the forces of production within capitalism. He had also ignored waiting for a numerically large and politically conscious proletarian class and the economic collapse of capitalism, the prerequisites for a social revolution. Lenin realized that the backward and primarily peasant economy of Russia in 1917 in no way resembled the technologically advanced capitalist mode of production that Marx envisaged before the unfolding of a socialist revolution. In the absence of a class-conscious modern working class, Lenin had innovated. He had replaced Marx's prediction of the leadership role of the proletariat, with the vanguard role of a centralized party representing the proletariat and the peasants. Lenin's party was mainly controlled by professional intellectual revolutionaries.

The special conditions of Russia had required Lenin to adapt and modify Marx's theory on the agents and modality of the revolution. This process of adapting Marx's theory of revolution to the national sociopolitical realities of countries was later followed by the Chinese and Cuban revolutionaries. Universal theories of Marxist revolution were becoming groomed and customized to national socio-economic and political formations. There was no reason why Iranian

revolutionary Marxists could not engage in the same kind of modification of Marx and Lenin's original formulations to initiate the overthrow of the Shah's regime.

Ahmadzadeh's work, coming on the heels of Pouyan's call to arms, not only expressed the urgency of action but sought to explain the rationale for it. Castro's position that revolutions needed revolutionaries, and that "those who want to make the revolution have the right and duty to constitute themselves as a vanguard," resonated deeply with Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh, as well as with their circle of militants.⁸

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The twenty-three-year-old Ahmadzadeh was rebelling against the well-articulated orthodox edifice that the Tudeh Party had constructed based on a set of timeless Marxist–Leninist laws, formulations, and generalizations. As such, Ahmadzadeh's work was not only a manual for liberation from the Shah's regime, but a clarion call to free Marxist revolutionaries from the theoretical straitjacket of non-revolutionary Marxism.

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The fruitful retreat

Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh finished writing his detailed work which came to be known as *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic* (Mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, ham estrategy, ham taktik) in August of 1970. This treatise of some 22,000 words, originally entitled "Effectuating revolutionary violence" (e'mal-e gahr-e enqelabi), was the product of Ahmadzadeh's one-month reflective retreat, during which he locked himself up with a typewriter at Jalal Naqqash's safe house on Shadman Street in the south of Tehran.⁹

▪

In the spring of 1970, the main political group frequented by Ahmadzadeh in

Tehran was at a crucial existential crossroads, typical of many other intellectual Marxist circles of the period. Having engaged in a five-year period of self-taught ideological training, the small study circle centred around Bijan Hirmanpour had evolved to a point where it needed to decide on what to do in the future. A road map with appropriate tactics, strategies, and organizational structures needed to be formulated, and Ahmadzadeh's writing intended to do just that.¹⁰

▪

The main objective of the Group was to identify the appropriate means of struggle against the regime. They based their endeavours on studies of Iran's socio-economic realities as perceived and identified by the Group, especially after land reform. From late 1969, after long internal deliberations, members of the Group were asked to provide their individual assessment of Iran's sociopolitical and economic conditions, along with their arguments for, and recommendations on, the appropriate means of continuing the anti-Shah struggle.¹¹

▪

Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic reflected Ahmadzadeh's appraisal. In this pamphlet, Ahmadzadeh presented his reasoning for promoting armed struggle. More importantly, he explained the process through which their group reached one certitude, and then, reviewing the realities on the ground, arrived at a very different conclusion. Taken at face value, the narrative of how the Group arrived at their final decision on the correct method of struggle dispels the suspicion that they had a preconceived idée fixe.

Ahmadzadeh demonstrates the zigzag process by which he and his comrades first rejected armed struggle in favour of working towards the establishment of a proletarian party as was stipulated by the Leninist tradition. After grasping the insurmountable problems of founding a proletarian party in Iran, they revisited their alternatives. The Group eventually ended up adopting armed struggle as an immediate solution and a prerequisite for establishing a proletarian party.¹²

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The Debray factor: From Havana to Tehran via Mashhad

In *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic*, the traces of international revolutionary Marxism are clearly visible. Ahmadzadeh's writing indicates that, during its theoretical pursuits, the Group first read and analysed Régis Debray's book *Revolution in the Revolution?* and rejected the application of its main findings to the socio-economic conditions in Iran. They, therefore, abandoned the immediate idea of launching an armed struggle, à la Cuban. It was only later that the Group returned to the book, reconsidered its content and endorsed the Cuban road and Debray's thesis.¹³

▪

Based on an account attributed to Pouyan, after Debray's book was criticized and its main thesis was refuted by the Mashhad revolutionary circle, it was Ahmadzadeh who once again returned to this text and placed it on the agenda for further study.¹⁴

▪

After revisiting Debray's text for a second time, and once Debray's ideas were embraced, many of his ideas found their echo in Ahmadzadeh's writing.

On numerous occasions, in *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic*, Ahmadzadeh refers to Régis Debray's manifesto and draws amply upon it to develop his arguments. Debray's text came into Ahmadzadeh's possession through Hirmanpour, who bought *Revolution in the Revolution?* at Jahan or Gutenberg bookstore on Manouchehri Street in Tehran. The edition bought by Hirmanpour and handed over to Ahmadzadeh was an English translation, published by Monthly Review Press in 1967.¹⁵

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Ahmadzadeh began translating the book into Farsi in the summer of 1968. The final translation was also typed by Ahmadzadeh.¹⁶

▪

Ne'emat Mirzazadeh recalls that at around 14:00 on a day in early September 1968, Pouyan, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Bahman Ajang, Hamid Tavakoli, and Sa'id Ariyan, the core members of Mashhad's revolutionary Marxist group,

congregated at his house. Ahmadzadeh and Ajang, sitting next to one another, pulled out two photocopied English versions of *Revolution in the Revolution?* from their briefcases. Then they took out a stack of Farsi translations, placed them next to the English texts, and set to work. At the meeting, which lasted until 21:00, Pouyan asked Mirzazadeh to look over the editing of the Farsi translation of Debray's book. Based on Mirzazadeh's account, it would be safe to assume that the final Farsi translation of *Revolution in the Revolution?* was the work of both Ahmadzadeh and Ajang. At the time, Bahman Ajang was studying English Language and Literature at Mashhad University.¹⁷

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In his book on armed struggle, Ahmadzadeh refers to key articles by Western and Latin American intellectuals and activists who criticized Debray's theories.¹⁸

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A compilation of reviews, treatises, and commentaries critically assessing Debray's book had appeared in a book called *Regis Debray and the Latin American Revolution* published by Monthly Review Press.¹⁹

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Multiple references to this book demonstrate that Ahmadzadeh, and probably the young Iranian revolutionaries in his circle, were exposed to the latest theoretical debates on the subject. A close study of Ahmadzadeh's text, with an eye to his references and long translated passages, demonstrates that the original theoreticians of armed struggle in Iran were widely and well read.

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Learning from the past

Ahmadzadeh traced the origins of Iran's recent problems to the 1953 coup against Mosaddeq. The post-coup regime, he believed, had dismantled, and dissipated all nationalist and anti-imperialist political organizations.²⁰

▪

The “treachery and mistakes of the Tudeh Party”, before and after the coup, had added to the tangles. Ahmadzadeh considered that the Tudeh Party’s actions had prompted the revolutionary intellectuals to lose all confidence in it. Completely discouraged by the legacy of the Tudeh Party, Ahmadzadeh maintained that it was the Mosaddeqist political organizations which attracted Iran’s revolutionary intellectuals after the coup. Yet, confronted with an enemy who spoke only the “language of force and the bayonet”, National Front style political rallies and strikes were doomed to failure.

The old methods of struggle and the aged slogan of “establishing the rule of law and instituting free elections” had become dated.²¹

▪

The forces which had coalesced and united loosely around the National Front and its satellite political formations against the regime were swiftly dispersed and repressed after the 5 June 1963 (15 Khordad 1342) uprising. Ahmadzadeh lamented that, once again, the “heavy monster of the bayonet imposed its dominion everywhere”.²²

▪

He characterized the old political methods of protest as shackles paralysing the struggle against the enemy.²³

▪

Ahmadzadeh attributed the ebbing of the anti-regime struggle after 5 June 1963 to the regime’s success in “violently repressing the struggle”.²⁴

▪

The psychological impact of this historical benchmark on political activists was critical and decisive. It confirmed that neither legal and parliamentary methods (1960–1962) nor spontaneous street politics had the power to effectuate political change. Summarizing the state of mind of his generation, Ahmadzadeh wrote, “Under conditions of repression and terror when our people’s struggle was defeated, and our revolutionary intellectuals were devoid of theoretical and practical experiences, we were obliged to start all over again.” In such difficult circumstances, “The new communist movement came afoot, and the simple assembling of forces began.”²⁵

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Breaking with the old sacred cows

Ahmadzadeh held the old generation of political activists responsible for the political cul-de-sac of his generation. Even though he lamented the rupture in the transmission of useful political theory, experience, and wisdom from old political activists to the new, he found this lacuna liberating. The bankruptcy of old oppositional political theories and organizations allowed for new thinking. The young Ahmadzadeh was not only challenging the political legacy of the Tudeh Party and the National Front at home but was taking a further bold step. In unison with other international Marxist revolutionaries he gleefully declared that “today, it seems as though real Marxism–Leninism is an empty shell in need of being refilled.”²⁶

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Ahmadzadeh was loudly announcing the autonomy and independence of his generation of revolutionaries from previous political ideas and traditions, domestic and international. Reviving the dampened revolutionary spirit and ardour of the people could only be realized through reliance on a new revolutionary reading of Marxism–Leninism. This new reading, Ahmadzadeh believed, was synonymous with the thoughts of Mao, and deeply influenced by the Cuban Revolution. This form of Marxism–Leninism, different from hitherto versions, he argued, would become the source of inspiration and the guiding torch of the “most resolute revolutionaries”.²⁷

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Ahmadzadeh insisted on Iran’s concrete sociopolitical conditions and observed that there were no signs of spontaneous mass movements. He argued that workers’ organizations and labour unions were absent because of the pervasive presence of the police in the workplace. Under their watchful eyes it was impossible for revolutionaries to contact the working class and create a labour or guild movement. Even if they were successful in initiating such movements, the

police would repress them immediately. Under these circumstances, Ahmadzadeh admitted that workers were neither prepared to participate in the struggle nor were there signs of them becoming politically conscious. Consequently, he declared that it was unrealistic to expect the spontaneous emergence of working-class organizations.²⁸

▪

Based on classical Marxism–Leninism, Ahmadzadeh’s account of Iranian conditions did not justify an armed uprising.

Mulling over the sequential Leninist line of argument, that the outpouring of spontaneous mass movements was a prerequisite for a revolutionary upsurge, Ahmadzadeh sought to understand the reasons for the absence of spontaneous mass movements in Iran. Most importantly, he tried to deduce the political implication of its absence. Comparing the conditions in Russia on the eve of the revolution with those in Iran, Ahmadzadeh ruled that the two countries had nothing in common.²⁹

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The regime’s policy of terror and violence dissuaded the masses from participating in sociopolitical movements, scared them away from becoming politicized, and was successful in preventing intellectuals from establishing contact with the masses.³⁰

▪

As long as the regime exercised its oppressive rule, the masses would be unable to attain political consciousness.

Ahmadzadeh placed part of the blame for the absence of spontaneous mass movements on the weaknesses of revolutionary agents, leaders, and organizations.³¹

▪

Probably referring to the three days before the 19 August 1953 coup, and the days leading to the June uprising of 1963, Ahmadzadeh reproached the revolutionary leaders for failing to mobilize and organize the masses on a wide scale when they were ready for engagement. The failure of sound political judgement and leadership on their part, he argued, plunged the masses into a long stretch of disillusionment, hopelessness, and inertia.³²

▪

Departing from classical Marxism–Leninism, he posited, one should not deduce that the objective revolutionary conditions were absent because spontaneous mass movements were inexistent. Ahmadzadeh believed that objective revolutionary conditions existed in Iran, but his understanding of them differed from the classical view.

Ahmadzadeh framed his treatise and settled a score with armchair revolutionaries who desisted from entering into action. He asked rhetorically, “Would it be correct to conclude that in the absence of spontaneous mass movements, the objective revolutionary conditions are absent and that the revolutionary epoch (dowran enqelab) is not at hand?” “I do not think so.” Ahmadzadeh lambasted inaction under the pretext of the absence of objective revolutionary conditions as “opportunism, collaborationism and reformism”. He accused those who evoked such excuses of being “political cowards justifying inactivity”.³³

▪

For him, the revolutionary epoch was at hand.

In the absence of traditional prerequisites for launching an armed uprising, Ahmadzadeh argued that Iran was ready for revolutionary action. The intellectual revolutionaries who possessed political consciousness, he argued, were the available, willing, and able agents of radical change. For Ahmadzadeh, even though the regime had obstructed the emergence of classical preconditions for a revolution, the goal of changing the status quo could not be abandoned. It was the responsibility of intellectual revolutionaries to intervene and create the conditions which the regime had tried hard to forestall.

Abandoning classical Marxist determinism, Ahmadzadeh promoted revolutionary Marxist voluntarism. To provide theoretical justification for action, Ahmadzadeh coined a new concept, which later played into the hands of his theoretical opponents. He postulated that the “subjective manifestations of the readiness of the objective conditions of the revolution” were present.³⁴

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The proof, he argued, was in the prevalent enthusiasm and passion among the revolutionaries, their incessant quest to find the correct path to revolution, the relentless assault of the police on them, and the imprisonment, torture, and

murder of revolutionaries. Ahmadzadeh was applying his independent judgement and reasoning, making up a new set of preconditions. He argued that this different set of preconditions existed in Iran, vindicating his emphasis on armed struggle.

For Ahmadzadeh, the existence of “so many combative assemblies and groups belonging to all oppressed classes” constituted further proof that a different set of preconditions existed in Iran.³⁵

▪

The so-called objective conditions of the revolution existed because various groups of intellectual revolutionaries were preparing to take action and continued to rear their heads in spite of the repression.³⁶

▪

Ahmadzadeh put the final touch on his new spin, making imminent armed action justifiable in the absence of classical revolutionary conditions.

In democratic and semi-democratic countries, Ahmadzadeh posited, the possibility for political and trade union methods of struggle existed. This condition, in turn, provided an opportunity for the political maturity of the working class. In “extensively and intensively violent dictatorships”, neither the urban proletariat nor the rural masses had the possibility of organization or mobilization.³⁷

▪

Ahmadzadeh tried to demonstrate that in the absence of voluntarism, the classical objective and subjective conditions for the revolution would never ripen in Iran. He reminded his young politically conscious readers that waiting for the right and ripe revolutionary condition and moment was like waiting for Godot. Such a position was tantamount to abandoning their social responsibility and “accepting the status quo in practice”.³⁸

▪

Ahmadzadeh flaunted his autonomy from classical Marxism–Leninism and posed a heretical question to highlight the importance of the revolutionary intellectual vanguard. He asked, “Whoever said insurrection was the job of the people?” To answer his own question, he referred to Cuba’s successful experience where the people did not start the revolution.³⁹

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Armed struggle by the revolutionary vanguard

Ahmadzadeh designated the revolutionary vanguard as the force which would launch the armed struggle.⁴⁰

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Striking blows against the regime's image of impenetrable power and deadly hegemony, Ahmadzadeh argued, would show the people that the struggle had started. Its progress and success, in turn, would require the people's support and engagement.⁴¹

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Ahmadzadeh believed that once the vanguard began the struggle, the enormous "pent-up historical energy of the masses", curbed by the repressive stranglehold of the regime, would be gradually released.⁴²

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The lengthy process of armed struggle, according to Ahmadzadeh, would enable the masses to gain consciousness of their historical role as well as their invincible power.⁴³

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Ahmadzadeh, like Zia-Zarifi and Pouyan, believed that once the armed struggle began and became sustained, it would automatically generate momentum among the masses. This impetus would, in turn, draw the masses to the struggle, until the enemy was defeated. For Ahmadzadeh, therefore, the seemingly theoretical aberration of relying solely on revolutionary intellectuals to conduct the revolution was only a temporary and interim solution, suited to the specific condition of Iran.

Based on Iran's specificities and what he called the "recent revolutionary

experiences” in the country, Ahmadzadeh presented “the general path” or the “universal strategy” of the revolution. He borrowed Debray’s famous metaphor of the small and big engine. Once the small armed vanguard launched the uprising, Ahmadzadeh argued, the force of this initial assault would gradually thrust the masses, or the big engine, to join the struggle. The eventual defeat of the enemy would come about after the big engine was put into motion. The movement was, therefore, looking at a prolonged armed conflict.⁴⁴

▪

In line with both Zia-Zarifi and Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh warned that initially the bloodshed and pain resulting from the guerrillas’ armed operations and the regime’s subsequent terror would generate a sense of apathy and detachment among the masses. This sense of indifference, Ahmadzadeh believed, would give way to them embracing the struggle once the armed foco delivered sustained blows against the regime, indicating the proper path of the battle.⁴⁵

▪

For Ahmadzadeh, the stage of entering combat was crucial. It was only military operations that could destroy the deeply embedded conviction that the regime was unassailable. Twice in his text, Ahmadzadeh referred to Debray’s expression of the “age-old accumulation of fear and humility”, and argued that in Iran this state of mind had become a part of the peoples’ belief system.⁴⁶

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Ahmadzadeh repeated that words and political propaganda, incapable of changing the “age-old accumulation of fear and humility”, should be replaced by armed operations. Ahmadzadeh called upon all revolutionary groups to launch their politico-military operations wherever they deemed it possible.⁴⁷

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Notes

[1](#)

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‘Ali Jalal in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 21.

[2](#)

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Cherikha-ye fada’i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou beyn sazeman cherikha-ye fada’i-e khalq-e Iran va sazeman-e mojahedin-e khalq-e Iran (sal-e 1354), England: Cherikhay-e fada’i khalq-e Iran, 1393, p. 255. Hereafter: Cherikha-ye fada’i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou.

[3](#)

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V.I. Lenin, “Left-Wing” Communism, an Infantile Disorder, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970, p. 86.

[4](#)

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Lenin, “Left-Wing” Communism, an Infantile Disorder, p. 86.

[5](#)

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M. Ahmadzadeh, *Mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, ham estrategy, ham taktik*, n.p.: Sazemanha-ye jebheh-ye melli Iran kharej az keshvar (bakhsh-e khavar-e miyaneh), 1354, p. 76.

[6](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 78.

[7](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 86.

[8](#)

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R. Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?*, London: Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 96–97; Ahmadzadeh, p. 86.

[9](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 24, 51–53, 84–85.

[13](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 24, 50–51.

[14](#)

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‘Ali Tolou’, personal interview, March 2015.

[15](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, August 2015, a Paris suburb.

[16](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, March 1998 and August 2015, a Paris suburb.

[17](#)

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Mirzazadeh, personal interview, March 2015, Paris.

[18](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 90, 117, 119, 122.

[19](#)

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L. Huberman and P. Sweezy, Regis Debray and the Latin American Revolution, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968.

[20](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 19.

[21](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 19.

[22](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 19, 20.

[23](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 19, 20.

[24](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 41–42.

[25](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 21.

[26](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 22.

[27](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 22.

[28](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 62–63.

[29](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 51–53, 58–60.

[30](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 69–70.

[31](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 64.

[32](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 64–65.

[33](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 63–64.

[34](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 65.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 65.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 65–66.

[37](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 83.

[38](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 66.

[39](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 54.

[40](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 71–72.

[41](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 72.

[42](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 72.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 72.

[44](#)

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Debray, pp. 83, 108; Ahmadzadeh, pp. 54, 120–121, 133.

[45](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 133–134. The concept of an armed foco, formulated by Régis Debray, is a vanguard and small revolutionary group.

[46](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 65, 135.

[47](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 147, 151.

Bijan Jazani's Accounts of Why Armed Struggle

An approximately 18,000-word treatise, entitled *What a Revolutionary Should Know* (Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad), first came out in February or March 1972 (Esfand 1350).¹

This work was printed and distributed in London by Manouchehr Kalantari's 19 Bahman publishing house, under the name of 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani. More than three years later, on 25 June 1975, Kalantari published an authorless special issue called *The Jazani-Zarifi Group, the Vanguard of Iran's Armed Movement* (Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi: pishtaz-e jonbesh-e mosallahaneh-e Iran). The first section of this three-part text was devoted to the formation of the Jazani and Zarifi Group, and thirteen pages of it presented and analysed *What a Revolutionary Should Know*. It identified 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani as the person who compiled (tanzim) *What a Revolutionary Should Know* in August/September 1970 (avakher-e tabestan-e 1349). Furthermore, the treatise was said to reflect the views of the Jazani and Zia-Zarifi Group.

The authorless piece elaborated that the original manuscript of *What a Revolutionary Should Know* bore the date of summer 1970, along with 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani's initials in Farsi, 'Ayn-Saad. The lag between the penmanship of this work (summer 1970) and its publication (February/March 1972), some seventeen months later, was attributed to two police raids in Iran in November/December 1970 and January/February 1971.²

Some forty years later it became public that the authorless piece, The Jazani-Zarifi Group, the Vanguard of Iran's Armed Movement, had been written by Bijan Jazani.³

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So according to whom we know today to be Jazani, What a Revolutionary Should Know was compiled by Safa'i-Farahani in the summer of 1970.

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Mysteries around what a revolutionary should know

In 1999, it became public knowledge that What a Revolutionary Should Know was written by Bijan Jazani, and not 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani. According to Mihan Jazani, Bijan Jazani's wife, her husband had handed her What a Revolutionary Should Know during visiting hours at Qom prison and before the attack on Siyahkal (8 February 1971). At the time, Jazani had informed his wife that he was the author of the manuscript. However, he had written intentionally 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani's name to bolster his theoretical status among the revolutionaries. Jazani asked his wife to send the manuscript to Manouchehr Kalantari in London, and she dispatched the treatise as soon as possible.⁴

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Despite the consensus today that this treatise is the work of Jazani, Mehdi Same'i, one of the few surviving members of the remnants of Jazani's Group, recalled that in prison Jazani had insisted that this work was written by Safa'i-Farahani.⁵

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There is some confusion among Jazani's followers on when What a Revolutionary Should Know found its way out of prison. Farrokh Negahdar, a surviving member of the Jazani Group, and Behzad Karimi of the Fada'i Organization, maintain that the manuscript was smuggled out of Qom prison

around October/November 1970 (Aban 1349).⁶

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Mostafa Madani maintains that this manuscript was put at the disposal of the Fada'i Organization by Farrokh Negahdar in 1350 or after 21 March 1971.⁷

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A few considerations put into question the “official” date attributed to the writing of this work. Two critical pieces of information indicate that this work was probably written after the Siyahkal assault. First, according to Mihan Jazani, Bijan Jazani predated purposefully his works by one year (‘amedaneh tarikh yek sal qabl ra migozasht). She insisted that in the case of What a Revolutionary Should Know, Bijan Jazani “set the date one year before its actual penmanship”.⁸

▪

In the work The Jazani-Zarifi Group, the Vanguard of Iran’s Armed Movement, which we now know was penned by Jazani, the date of writing this treatise was set at August/September 1970 (avakher-e tabestan-e 1349).⁹

▪

Based on Mihan Jazani’s explanation of Bijan Jazani’s writing habits, the “actual” date of the penmanship of What a Revolutionary Should Know would be August/September 1971.

This date is some five to six months after the Siyahkal assault. Jazani wrote this treatise probably not in Qom, but at ‘Eshratabad prison around August/September 1971. ‘Abdollah Qavami, who spent two months at ‘Eshratabad prison in the fall of 1971, recalled that Jazani was very busy writing in prison, but he did not know what he was writing.¹⁰

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A second consideration makes the acceptance of the “official” date of penmanship (August/September 1970) even more difficult and renders the August/September 1971 date more likely. The probability that Jazani was writing What a Revolutionary Should Know in Safa’i-Farahani’s name around August and September of 1970 is almost impossible. Around this time, Safa’i-Farahani was in the middle of preparing his military mission. On 5 September 1970, Safa’i-Farahani was leading his team of guerrillas from Tehran to Mazandaran, poised to carry out the military operation against the Siyahkal Gendarmerie

Station.

It would be inconceivable to think that Jazani would have intentionally jeopardized the life of Safa'i-Farahani and his men by putting his name, or his initials, on an insurrectionary manuscript, which could have fallen into the hands of SAVAK. Jazani was extremely cautious about maintaining the safety and security of his comrades. He would not have jeopardized the success of a guerrilla operation. Jazani would have put his comrades in danger and compromised their sensitive military mission, had he put Safa'i-Farahani's name or initials on an insurrectionary pamphlet in August/September 1970.

The correct date of penmanship of What a Revolutionary Should Know is of importance. If this work were written before the Siyahkal assault of 8 February 1971, it would be considered as an autonomous and proactive piece. The August/September 1971 date of its authorship would, however, demonstrate that Jazani wrote his treatise in reaction to both Siyahkal and the urban guerrilla warfare that followed it. This piece by Jazani demonstrates considerable excitement for armed struggle.

An additional piece of information by Mihan Jazani points to another interesting pathway. She recalled that Bijan Jazani had Ahmadzadeh's Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic at 'Eshratabad prison.¹¹

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It is therefore probable that What a Revolutionary Should Know was written after Jazani had read Ahmadzadeh's treatise. With this in mind, Jazani's treatise should be considered as a reaction and in dialogue with the rural and urban guerrilla movement already underway.

Shortly after Siyahkal, Heydar Tabrizi was a student at Ariyamehr University of Technology. He belonged to one of the first groups of university students to join the Fada'is. In the fall of 1971, this group of university students asked the Fada'is for a reading list. Tabrizi recalled that while Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh's treatise, along with other translated works, was on the list, What a Revolutionary Should Know was not. He did not recall having seen the text until 1973.¹²

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To confront a monarchical military dictatorship

In *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, Jazani described the Iranian regime as a despotic monarchy, a monarchical military dictatorship, and an absolutist monarchy, in which the people were denied all social and political rights.¹³

▪

The Shah's dictatorship was characterized as an unrestrained personal rule with no limit or opposition. According to Jazani, all state institutions were under the Shah's wanton command, and there was not a single newspaper in the realm which would dare refer to the political realities of the country.¹⁴

▪

In Iran, Jazani argued, people were deprived of their basic needs. They were also denied the right to set up genuine organizations or associations, which would protect their legal rights and help them attain a higher standard of living.¹⁵

▪

Time and again, Jazani referred to the fact that due to the regime's naked dictatorship and the ruling establishment's (dastgah-e hakemeh) absolute intolerance for the slightest political criticism, political rights were trampled upon. The absence of "fundamental rights and freedoms", he argued, prevented the emergence of "social and economic organizations", "useful worker's associations", and "revolutionary organizations".¹⁶

▪

Based on the assertion that "all political and social rights of the people were crushed," Jazani came down clearly in favour of the violent path (rah-e qahramiz), or the path of armed struggle. He first posed the polemical question of "Which path should be chosen, the violent path or the peaceful path (rah-e mosalematamiz)?"¹⁷

▪

Jazani clearly ranked his preference based on his assessment of the existing political conditions, the aspirations of the movement, and then committed himself to a clear choice. He ruled that, faced with the ruling establishment's

unbridled use of military might to solve the country's political problems, "The people have no other solution other than resorting to violence and the gun."¹⁸

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In this piece, Jazani saw no in-between solutions. His either/or formulation of this question and his categorical answer that "the violent path would constitute the fundament (asaas) and axis (mehvar) of the revolutionary struggle," left no ambiguity in his position.¹⁹

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His conclusion on rejecting the peaceful path and adoption of the violent path was in line with Zia-Zarifi, Pouyan, and Ahmadzadeh. All four rejected the peaceful path, based on their assessment of the absence of political rights and freedoms.

Jazani echoed the works of his predecessors and strongly condemned the Tudeh Party's theoretical gymnastics of accepting armed struggle in principle, but then circumventing it by arguing that the objective and subjective conditions for entering the combat phase were absent. This position, Jazani argued, was effectively postponing armed struggle until eternity.²⁰

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Jazani stated that "we do not doubt that political confrontation with a system fundamentally based on a military dictatorship cannot be conducted in any other manner than a violent (qahramiz) one."²¹

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Jazani's message was clear. People had no other option but to resort to force (zoor) and arms (aslaheh).²²

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Revolutionary intellectuals: The dynamite of the revolutionary movement

To identify the most apt revolutionary force capable of “taking the first step of armed struggle towards the preparation of the revolution”, Jazani reviewed the status of the revolutionary classes in Iran.²³

▪

He observed that the objective conditions for a peasant revolution were absent in Iran. The peasantry, he acknowledged, would remain on the sidelines during the initial stages of the “revolutionary movement” (jonbesh-e enqelabi), since they were deprived of political consciousness.²⁴

▪

The urban working class were the most well disposed to join the struggle, but they too lacked political organization. Jazani postulated that the simple propagation of revolutionary slogans and promises was insufficient to galvanize the labouring masses. To secure the participation of the working class in the “revolutionary movement”, he suggested launching the armed struggle to “effectively engage the regime” in combat.²⁵

▪

Dubious of the readiness and willingness of the toiling classes to immediately support, let alone start the revolutionary movement, Jazani turned to the “young intellectuals”. He placed the full responsibility of jump-starting the revolutionary process on the “young urban petty bourgeois strata” and argued that they had “all the characteristics and features for commencing the movement”.²⁶

▪

Jazani concurred with Ahmadzadeh that the revolutionary intellectuals constituted the engine of the movement. Assuming that the piece was written after the Siyahkal assault, Jazani was reporting on how the movement had been jump-started.

To Jazani, the young intellectuals, however, needed to be armed with a revolutionary ideology. Explaining the important transition, from criticism and opposition to participating in the “revolutionary movement”, Jazani invoked a variant of the old Leninist dictum, and insisted that “there can be no revolution without a revolutionary way of thinking (tarz-e fekr-e enqelabi).”²⁷

▪

For Jazani, the intellectual revolutionaries had to realize that they were the

means to the ultimate liberation of the toiling masses, through a “people’s revolutionary movement” (jonbesh-e enqelabi-e tudeh’i).²⁸

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Jazani characterized “the genuine combatant” (mobarez-e vaqe’i) as one who was committed to “overthrowing the despotic ruling system and ending colonial penetration”. The “historical mission of this young generation”, he claimed, was to rise up against, and “put an end to the injustices committed throughout the centuries”. Jazani praised this “revolutionary generation” for its willingness to forgo its private “welfare and leisure” for the sake of “true democracy”, a higher ethical objective. For Jazani, “true democracy” and “the government of the people for the people” was distinct from “formal democracy”.²⁹

•

As if inviting his readers to act in a value-rational and instrumentally rational manner, Jazani identified the reflective process that should guide the actions of a revolutionary. Addressing the “revolutionary individual” (fard-e enqelabi), Jazani urged him/her to “envision the clear and specific goals available to him”, “clearly map out the various paths of struggle”, and “obtain information about all resources, facilities and means available” for struggle. He invited the revolutionary to “make use of those resources and means to initiate and persevere in the chosen path”. He heeded his readers to “think about defeat just as one would think of victory and prepare for such outcomes”.³⁰

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It would be after this process of identifying and ranking objectives, choosing and committing to one, and then making an informed analysis of the means available to that end, that revolutionary cells would be founded.³¹

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These revolutionary cells would then become the political-military vanguard units.

The first and foremost task of the revolutionary intellectuals, organized in cells of three to thirty combatants, was to carry out a political-military mission quickly.³²

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The guerrillas, Jazani emphasized, should not shy away from small attacks

against the ruling establishment, while preparing more grandiose and ambitious ones. Long preparations, he warned, usually resulted in inertia and destruction of a revolutionary group.³³

▪

At this time Jazani was promoting relentless military operations by completely clandestine revolutionary cells.³⁴

▪

Jazani predicted that armed struggle would start in cities. Under the rubric of armed engagement (dargiri-e mosallahaneh), he presented a relatively comprehensive list of activities for the guerrillas. Operations conducted by the revolutionary cells could involve disarming policemen, acts of terrorism (ijad-e yek teror), mass killing of the enemy, armed robbery of cash and military hardware, kidnapping key foreign diplomats, kidnapping influential and prominent members of the ruling establishment, and hijacking planes.³⁵

▪

He held the regime entirely responsible for the potential dangers and casualties caused by the activities of the revolutionary cells.

The preparation for the first stage of the revolution, Jazani posited, would be completed when three conditions were fulfilled. First, revolutionary cells or political-military groups had to be formed. Second, political and guild/economic cells had to be established. Third, leadership and logistic centres had to be established abroad.³⁶

▪

Jazani presented the formation of political and economic cells engaged in non-combative activities as a requirement for the completion of the preparatory stage of the revolution. Along with peaceful trade union and student activities at home, Jazani stressed the importance of two other types of non-combatant activities to be coordinated and directed from abroad. “Centres for the revolutionary and liberation movement” (marakez-e jonbesh-e enqelabi va azadibakhsh) would be responsible for such overseas activities.³⁷

▪

The role of these “Centres for the revolutionary and liberation movement” was to reach out to overseas revolutionaries, organizations, and training centres, and

to engage in revolutionary propaganda and publications.³⁸

▪

This overseas activity was to be carried out by those revolutionaries who were forced to leave the country. Jazani gave his approval for home revolutionary cells to engage in the publication and distribution of revolutionary literature. However, he warned that revolutionary publications should not jeopardize the safety of revolutionary cells operating domestically.³⁹

▪

For Jazani, “the next stage” of the revolution implied “the extension of armed struggle throughout the country”. At this stage, the revolutionaries would take “lead of the political struggle in society and establish the highest centre of revolutionary leadership for the movement (‘alitarin markaz-e rahbari-e enqelabi baray-e jonbesh)”.⁴⁰

▪

This second stage, according to Jazani, involved a radical shift in the balance of power. The revolutionary forces would take the upper hand and impose their hegemony on the regime. Once the revolutionary forces consolidated their military supremacy and took political leadership of the struggle, they were poised to form a party. Having united the dispersed national forces, the National Liberation Front would defeat the ruling establishment in a people’s war.⁴¹

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Jazani’s paradoxical hints

In view of the unpreparedness of the working classes, there was a consensus among the four theoreticians that the revolutionary intellectuals were to shoulder the responsibility of armed struggle. Neither the degree of success of armed struggle nor the time necessary for it to consolidate its position and take the upper hand was determined in advance. Moreover, it was not clear how long it

would take the popular masses to join the movement, and how long the revolutionary intellectuals would be obliged to lead and carry out the struggle alone.

While the thrust of Jazani's pamphlet focused on the importance and necessity of armed struggle, it exhibited brief instances of doubt about what he called a despotic and absolutist monarchical military dictatorship. This unexplained uncertainty in turn affected his analysis and propositions. During these moments of hesitation, Jazani envisaged some sort of special breathing space, a political truce, or an interlude, during which the regime would relax its suffocating social and political repression, allowing for non-violent struggle. In his treatise, Jazani wavered on Iran's political situation, the revolutionary agents, the leadership of the movement, and what the revolutionaries could and should do, in terms of changing the regime.

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Revolutionary agents and the question of leadership in a despotic or democratic Iran

Jazani wished to solve a problem. How to entice workers to join the revolution? He asserted that workers "should develop the capability to end police hegemony and create their own revolutionary organizations". Jazani predicted that "the young generation of workers and toilers would undoubtedly be the first of this class to join the revolution." In the long run this may have been possible but in the short run, Iran's socio-economic and political conditions were not conducive to such a development. Jazani acknowledged that workers were "disorganized and demoralized". He suggested that they needed to be assured that the "intellectual movement" aimed at "their liberation and at realizing the rule of all toilers". Jazani recognized the uselessness of "plans, programs and slogans" in motivating the toilers to join in the revolution. His solution was that "through effective combat with the ruling system, the possibility of reviving the political and guild movement of workers and toilers must be created."⁴²

▪

The practical aspect of this straightforward formula was complicated. Did it mean that armed struggle was expected to create a space for political and labour union activities, thereby drawing workers into the movement?

How long after launching the armed struggle did Jazani envisage the political and guild movement to be in place? Who would organize it? Why would the dictatorial regime allow for such a space? Jazani was providing a schematic account of how things should work out in theory. He could not predict how workers were supposed to go from a state of atomization and inorganization to one of creating their own revolutionary organizations. Lacking political consciousness, fearful of assembling, and unfamiliar with trade union organizations, it was not easy to launch the labour union movement. The timeline by which politically passive workers were to be transformed into revolutionaries was not specified.

Most importantly, even though Jazani suggested that the sympathizers of the revolutionary movement should establish such workers' organizations, he did not explicitly state how. Nor did he explain the relationship between such sympathizers leading a public life and the clandestine revolutionaries carrying out military operations. The devil was in the details, and the practical issues of Jazani's straightforward formula later became a bone of contention.

Having assigned a critical role to peaceful political and labour union activities in the success of the movement, Jazani looked for suitable actors in this domain. In contrast to the other theoreticians of armed struggle, Jazani acknowledged the fact that there were people in society who wanted to participate in the revolutionary movement yet did not wish to opt for armed struggle. He identified a social role and a place in the broad revolutionary movement for non-combatants. These were people who did not have enough experience to set up revolutionary cells or were not ready to commit themselves to the "selflessness" required of genuine combatants.⁴³

▪

According to Jazani's formulation, this non-combatant auxiliary group of helpers would be assigned "to shoulder" other responsibilities "in preparation for the revolution". Their task, he argued, would be "the formation of political and guild/economic groups".⁴⁴

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These non-combatant sympathizers would become the organizers and leaders of “public/open activities” (fa‘aliyatha-ye ‘omoumi). Jazani argued that the non-combatants could also form “cells” operating in factories, schools, universities, and other commercial, economic, and cultural units, whipping up support for the preparatory phase of the revolution.⁴⁵

▪

These cells would be legal and above board as compared to the clandestine guerrilla cells.

Was Jazani imagining a democratic “breathing space” which would allow for “reviving the political and guild movement of workers and toilers”, or was he thinking that the military operations and success of the guerrillas would force the regime to allow for such activities? Jazani seemed to be juxtaposing two situations which may have been mutually exclusive. The emphasis on creating political and guild movements by non-combatant sympathizers, without specifying the time, context, and condition, in tandem with the pressing need to launch armed struggle, bore the embryo of a potential ambiguity for revolutionary practitioners.

Jazani was categorical that armed struggle was the indubitable path of struggle. He labelled individuals and organizations who doubted or delayed armed struggle as “deceitful idiots”, “conservatives”, and “ambitious adventurists”.⁴⁶

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At no point in his pamphlet did Jazani back down from the urgency of launching armed struggle and prioritizing armed struggle over all other forms of struggle, in preparation for the revolution.⁴⁷

▪

In the context of the overall picture of his treatise, Jazani’s references to peaceful activities seemed incidental and ancillary. Having confirmed twice in four lines that armed struggle was the only (juz tavasol be zoor va aslaheh; juz az rah-e gahramiz) option available for the people to solve their problems, he acknowledged almost in passing that “in the meantime (dar ‘ayn-e hal), we will not overlook any peaceful possibility.”⁴⁸

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A notion which seemed rather important to his analysis of the victory of the

movement was being raised rather sheepishly.

Jazani must have realized that his idea of peaceful cells operating openly in factories, universities, and other workplaces under conditions of a military dictatorship was somewhat inconsistent. He cautiously explained his vision of how such cells would become operational. “In case” (chenancheh) the political-military groups “had the possibility (emkan dashteh bashad) to create political-guild/economic groups from reserve personnel around themselves”, they should be careful and avoid any connection between the two. He warned that “the revolutionary cell should remain completely camouflaged from the guild/economic cell.”⁴⁹

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Jazani envisaged a reserve army of non-violent sympathizers spun around the revolutionary cells with a free hand from the government to establish trade unions and militant organizations of all sorts.

The potential ambiguity about the significance, role, and place of armed struggle, in contrast to political and labour union struggle, in the revolutionary movement spilled over into the leadership issue. At times, Jazani seemed to be divided on the leading role of revolutionary intellectuals. He argued that “the young intellectuals constitute the force with the greatest practical and actual ability (belfe ‘ltarin) in the movement.”⁵⁰

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Jazani acknowledged their irreplaceable role in launching the movement while he longed for the working class to be in charge. Jazani, contrary to Ahmadzadeh, did not feel comfortable with a clear break with classical Marxism–Leninism. For Jazani, who had strong residues of classical Marxism–Leninism, the movement had to be led by the working class, not by petty bourgeois intellectuals.

Focusing on the necessity of drawing the masses into the movement, while himself in prison, Jazani accused the revolutionary intellectuals of being ignorant of the crucial role of the toiling classes in realizing the revolution. Jazani cautioned the “young intellectuals” that they should not forget that they could act only as “the detonators of the revolution’s dynamite but [could] not [generate] the revolution’s full blast”.⁵¹

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Jazani found himself in an awkward position. His dilemma was that without the revolutionary intellectuals, there would be no explosion. For the time necessary to draw the workers and peasants into the revolution, it was the revolutionary intellectuals who had to march alone. They had taken the initiative and struck the first blows against the regime. Jazani seemed to be running after them, condoning their bold actions while cautiously moving to hem them in theoretically and practically.

Notes

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A-A. Safa'i-Farahani, *Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad*, n.p.: 19 Bahman, Farvardin 1355, Chap-e dovom, p. 1. This work is by Bijan Jazani. Hereafter referred to as *Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad*.

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“Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi”, pp. 49–50.

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Heydar Tabrizi, p. 8.

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Mihan Jazani, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=59860>

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, 7 May 2014 (retrieved 2 August 2017); Mihan Jazani and Mostafa Madani in *Kanoun-e gerdavari va nashr-e asar-e Jazani, Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, Paris: Khavaran, 1378, pp. 67, 396. Hereafter referred to as *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*.

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Mehdi Same‘ in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 141.

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Kar Online, <http://asre-nou.net/php/view.php?objnr=30658>

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(retrieved 13 June 2018); Farrokh Negahdar, personal correspondence, April 2017; Mostafa Madani in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 396.

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Madani in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 396.

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Mihan Jazani in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 67.

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“Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi”, p. 49.

[10](#)

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‘Abdollah Qavami, personal conversation, 4 August 2019.

[11](#)

▪

Mihan Jazani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 68.

[12](#)

▪

Heydar Tabrizi, personal conversation, 21 September 2019.

[13](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 23, 32.

[14](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 33.

[15](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 38.

[16](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 22–23, 38–39, 54–55.

[17](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65. See Vahabzadeh’s reflections on qahr and violence in Vahabzadeh, p. 100.

[18](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

[19](#)

▪

Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

[20](#)

▪

Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 60, 65.

[21](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

[22](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

[23](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

[24](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 53.

[25](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 54.

[26](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 53–54.

[27](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 55.

[28](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 58–59.

[29](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 57.

[30](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 55, 78.

[31](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 66–67.

[32](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 66–67.

[33](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 66–67.

[34](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 75.

[35](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 70–71.

[36](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 69.

[37](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 68–69.

[38](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 68–69.

[39](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 69.

[40](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 69.

[41](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 69.

[42](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 54. The emphasis is mine.

[43](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 67.

[44](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 67.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 67–68.

[46](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 51, 65, 67.

[47](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 56–57, 65, 66, 72, 74.

[48](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

[49](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 68.

[50](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 54.

[51](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 54.

The Tudeh Party's Awkward Tango with Armed Struggle

In the post-coup crackdown on the Tudeh Party of Iran, some 3,469 members were arrested, and 27 members of the Officers' Organization were executed. With the arrest and execution of Khosrow Rouzbeh in May 1958, the Tudeh Party was effectively dismantled in Iran. In response to the bloody repression of its members, in March 1960, the Tudeh Party announced its position on the political situation in Iran. It emphasized that after the 1953 coup, "the police state in Iran" had made it very difficult to carry out any form of overt political struggle and called on its members to "fuse covert and overt operations" in their struggle against the regime.¹

Avoiding mention of what was exactly meant by covert operations, the Tudeh Party left it to the imagination of its members to define the activities which could fall under such a rubric.

From December 1962, the polemical exchanges between pro-Soviet European Communist Parties and the China–Albania Communist Parties became public. Some three months later, the flurry of letters between the Communist Parties of China and the Soviet Union demonstrated that a major ideological rift was underway "shaking the unity of fraternal parties".²

By September 1963, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was labelled

“revisionist”. This was an ideologically vindictive term that had been used by China for its attacks on Tito’s Yugoslavia. In January 1964, the Chinese Communist Party accused its Soviet counterpart of having “sunk deeper and deeper into the mire of revisionism”.³

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Ideological rift over revolution-making

At the heart of China’s ideological clash with the Soviet Union was the latter’s gradual loss of revolutionary ardour. The Soviet Union had embarked on a political course of action to serve her own national interests. The foreign policy theory of “peaceful coexistence” towards the US was intended to tone down the long-standing confrontation between the imperialist and socialist camp. Faced with the increasing threat of nuclear war, the Soviet Union hoped to diffuse the danger of mass destruction by initiating a thaw in the ongoing cold war between the two superpowers.

The Soviet Union’s notion of “peaceful competition”, a by-product of the theory of peaceful coexistence, aimed at calming down the quarrel over one economic system burying the other. To settle the economic rivalry between the two competing systems, the Soviet Union posited that socialist economies could prove their superiority through performance, setting an example that would be followed by all. Along with these two new policies went the controversial notion of a “peaceful transition” to socialism, implicitly rejecting bloody uprisings and violent revolutions. The three peaceful notions were intended to soften the Soviet Union’s intransigent image of inciting international havoc and insurrection against the capitalist camp and its allies.

This political blueprint promoted the parliamentary road to socialism in Western democracies. The real controversy, however, centred around the new position of pro-Soviet Communist Parties in non-democratic Third World countries. Such parties felt compelled to tone down substantially, and even end hostilities

towards their respective countries. The ramification of Moscow's new doctrine for Iran was a less revolutionary and more accommodating Tudeh Party.

The implementation of Khrushchev's "creative solution" meant moving from subversive and seditious incitements to embracing diplomacy and law and order. Committed to changing the world through revolution, and confronting violence with violence, the Chinese Communist Party became the champion of revolutionary Marxism. It dubbed the Soviet initiative as a betrayal of "genuine Marxism-Leninism", and a "modern version of revisionism". The Chinese asserted that the "modern revisionists" feared "imperialism", "genuine Marxism and Leninism", and "the revolutionary people".⁴

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The notion of "peaceful transition", implying the futility of revolution, came crashing down against a rising tide of revolutionary fervour and success in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The success stories of the Cuban, Algerian, and Vietnamese experiences added to the enthusiasm and fascination for the armed revolutionary path. China's outspoken ideological opposition to the Soviet concept of "peaceful transition", and its support for "armed struggle" as "the correct road to win independence and freedom", caught the attention of the revolutionary youth worldwide.⁵

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Belittling the argument that the threat of a nuclear war combined with the importance of survival necessitated a "peaceful transition", the Chinese accused the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) of "preventing" the oppressed people "from rising in revolution and fighting for their emancipation".⁶

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Iranian students take sides

The Sino-Soviet split, and the ideological debates surrounding it, caught the

attention of pro-Tudeh Party Iranian students in Europe. In April 1964, Tudeh Party members and sympathizers, under the leadership of Mohsen Rezvani and Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, gathered in Munich to secede from the Tudeh Party. Most of those attending were young university students and graduates in the West. What came to be known as the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (Sazeman-e enqelabi-e hezb-e tudeh) was born out of this meeting.

The spiritual father and instigator of this split was Parviz Nikkhah. He had lobbied extensively for an organization distinct from the Tudeh Party, one which would pursue armed struggle in Iran. Nikkhah had returned to Iran to prepare the grounds for armed struggle before the April 1964 meeting in Munich. The Tudeh Party's loyalty to the CPSU and their hope to reconcile their differences with the Iranian regime frustrated the young Tudeh Party members.⁷

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The first official meeting of the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (ROTP) was held in Tirana, Albania, in November 1964. Mohsen Rezvani and Fereydoun Keshavarz, an old Tudeh Party member, were credited for organizing this meeting which aligned itself clearly with the Chinese camp. At the Tirana conference, Mohsen Rezvani, Bijan Hekmat, Bijan Chehrazi, and Kouros Lasha'i were elected leaders of the new revolutionary organization.⁸

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Between 1962 and 1964, the Tudeh Party established a strong organizational presence in all major Western European cities, especially on university campuses. During this period, it had a monopoly over Marxist–Leninist ideology among Iranian opposition organizations. According to Kouros Lasha'i, at this time, the revolutionary Iranians in the West gravitated towards the Tudeh Party. Gradually, however, these young adherents came to consider their leadership in Eastern Europe as a handful of bureaucrats and careerists following orders from above. In the eyes of the young blood, the Tudeh Party was neither interested in their opinion, nor in radical change.⁹

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The ideological disputes between the Communist Parties of China and the Soviet Union provided the disenchanted Tudeh Party students with an ideal opportunity to break with Soviet-inspired Marxism and embrace the revolutionary position of the Chinese. Nouredin Kianouri, who later became the Secretary-General of the Tudeh Party, recalled that the Maoist split was the “biggest secession in the

history of the Tudeh Party and carried with it some ninety percent of the party's members in the West".¹⁰

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In Lasha'i's opinion, all Tudeh Party members in the West who were not intimidated by party reprisals joined the Maoist rebellion. Even Tudeh Party members in Eastern Europe were sending messages of support to the secessionists.¹¹

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The Tudeh Party's reluctant approval of armed struggle

The eleventh plenum of the Tudeh Party's Central Committee was convened two months after the Tirana meeting of the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party. The eleventh plenum was operating under the long and heavy shadow of an unprecedented loss of adherents caused by the split. The rebels had argued that the Tudeh Party's blind following of the CPSU's policies proved that it had become a stale reformist and conservative organization. The members of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party needed to prove otherwise. Something had to be done to contain the exodus.

The eleventh plenum of the Tudeh Party's Central Committee met on 20 January 1965 in Moscow.¹²

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An important report on the political situation in Iran emerged from this meeting and was later made public.¹³

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It characterized the regime as a "despotic monarchy", and confirmed that it was "anti-national" (zedd-e melli) and "anti-democratic". The Shah was depicted as having complete control over the executive, judiciary, and legislature, and

SAVAK was said to have been given free rein. The report went through a long list, enumerating the absence of democratic rights and freedoms in Iran, and concluded that the regime relied on two levers to maintain its rule: the use of terror, and the support of US and UK imperialism. It also referred to the 5 June 1963 uprising in Iran and pointed out that the unarmed demonstration of the people had been repressed with unprecedented brutality and bloodletting.

Under the subheading of “the roadmap of evolution/change (tahavvol) in our country”, the Tudeh Party posed the old question: “Which path should be followed to successfully overthrow the coup regime and install a national and democratic government?” The response seemed clear. Iranians could resolve their problems through peaceful means if democratic rights and freedoms were respected. In their absence, the Tudeh Party ruled that political organizations were compelled to reach the conclusion that the regime should be overthrown through violent means (rah-e qahramiz).¹⁴

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This conclusion, however, was in contradiction to the notion of “peaceful transition” promoted by the CPSU. The dilemma of the Tudeh Party was to present itself as being in favour of armed struggle, thereby stopping the haemorrhage of its members, without crossing the red line of “peaceful transition” set by the Soviets.

The Tudeh Party report engaged in various degrees of theoretical gymnastics. Unable to promote the armed struggle without reservation, it prioritized but did not commit to it. The Tudeh Party’s Central Committee submitted that they had concluded that the violent road of revolution “was of greater priority” (barjestigi-e bishtar-i kasb mikonad). Nevertheless, it argued that “in the future, the possibility of another opportunity, namely the possibility of peaceful means could not be entirely ruled out.” The report mentioned that the actions of the Tudeh Party, therefore, needed to be based on “the existence of these two possibilities”, even though “the possibility of violent revolution” had “pre-eminence” (‘omdeh boudan). This confusing conclusion, later finding its echo in Jazani’s work, implied the combination of two incompatible roads to change, each derived from very different assessments of Iran’s political situation.

The Central Committee of the Tudeh Party first concluded that democratic conditions were inexistent in Iran since a despotic police state was in power. It proceeded, however, to suggest that democratic conditions and the rule of law

could come to prevail in the future, making a case for peaceful means of struggle. Based on this remote possibility, it jumped to the conclusion of “two possibilities” and warned against “adventurism”. The Central Committee ruled that the most important task of members and sympathizers was to resuscitate the Tudeh Party, as the precondition for any kind of struggle.

Some three months after its lukewarm support of armed struggle, the Tudeh Party began to systematically undermine its primacy. It argued that violent and non-violent means were not incompatible, and aspects of each could be combined and used effectively. It reasoned that the notion of revolution was not necessarily synonymous with “rebellion” (qiyam) and armed activities (eqdamat-e mosallahaneh). The Tudeh Party posited that due to the weakening of the imperialist camp, numerous countries had attained their independence and freedom through “more or less peaceful means”. Concurrently, it argued that its warnings about the violent path were not intended to negate and weaken the “main thesis of the path of violent revolution” but were for “avoiding the pitfall of promoting one path to an absolute status”. Steering the middle path, the Tudeh Party claimed that it aimed to ward off opportunism and pacifism as well as adventurism or sectarianism.¹⁵

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The party leadership was trying to walk on two incompatible legs. It was engaging in theoretical somersaults to sound revolutionary, while in effect warding off the revolution.

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The Tudeh Party pushes back against armed struggle

Some fourteen months after its first bashful flirtation with armed struggle, the Tudeh Party began to back-pedal. In a lengthy article called “A Sectarian and Adventurist Line”, the Tudeh Party responded to a pamphlet published by the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (ROTP). In the introduction to

the article, published in the March–April 1966 issue of Mardom, the secessionist ROTP was accused of basing its efforts on “a completely sectarian, left-wing and adventurist” approach. The official organ of the Tudeh Party denounced the ROTP for “mechanically following the Chinese Communist Party” and “staunchly opposing the Tudeh Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union”.¹⁶

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The article posited that the ideological adversaries of the Tudeh Party believed in “only one type of struggle, namely revolutionary and guerrilla war (nabard-e partizani) and only one type of organization, namely armed cells”. Referring to Lenin’s “Left-Wing” Communism, an Infantile Disorder, the article claimed that the belief in armed struggle as a single solution went against the proper understanding “of the conditions for a realistic struggle”. As such, it was “petty-bourgeois revolutionariness” which “resembled anarchism”.

The article rejected the contention that “the revolution in Iran will only succeed through the violent approach and armed struggle.” It refuted the claim that “revolutionary and explosive conditions” existed in Iran and reminded the Marxists that one cannot play with an uprising, “pushing forward” the revolution through “voluntarism and adventurism”. It reiterated that peaceful means were an equally valid option and contended that “in view of their deep humaneness, the revolutionary proletariat would certainly prefer the peaceful path”.

The Tudeh Party took pains to assert, however, that at no time did it negate the usefulness and benefit of armed struggle, “in case the necessary conditions for it existed”. The importance of paying close attention to the “necessary conditions”, it contended, was not meant to “delay eternally” violent revolution but to steer clear from “voluntarism, subjectivism, and adventurism”. Finally, it reminded everyone that it was up to the party to decide on the proper path of the revolution in the future.

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Revolution means employing peaceful methods of struggle

Under pressure from the Chinese Communist Party, and the newly converted Iranian Maoists abroad between 1964 and 1966, the Tudeh Party felt obliged to employ the terms “violent means of struggle”, “revolutionary war”, and “armed struggle” in its publications.¹⁷

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The Tudeh Party was in effect name-dropping. During this period, having evoked the term “armed struggle”, the Tudeh Party proceeded to demonstrate that in the absence of the “necessary conditions”, peaceful means were a preferred tactic. During the rest of 1966, the Tudeh Party took further steps to effectively erase the notion of armed struggle and replace it with peaceful methods.

In April 1966, the official organ of the Tudeh Party published an article called “Long Live Leninism”. In it, the Tudeh Party attributed four characteristics to the Leninist tactic of revolution: the creation of the working-class party, a widespread campaign to awaken the masses, combining overt and covert activities, and finally, “taking advantage of the revolutionary condition which will certainly arrive to assail the class enemy’s fortress”. The Tudeh Party deferred the realization of the revolution to a distant future. It argued that the Leninist theory was concerned with preparing for rather than launching the revolution. It further argued that, when that distant moment approached, “The overthrow of the class enemy would require an armed uprising only if the enemy resorts to armed resistance.”¹⁸

▪

In August–September 1966, the Tudeh Party distinguished between long-term goals of the revolution, and immediate tactical objectives. It posited that, “in the present circumstances, the struggle for securing democratic freedoms and rights constitutes the most important component of our Party’s struggle.” It subsequently urged party members to fight for those objectives which would help secure such rights. The Tudeh Party’s list of objectives was made up of democratic demands and those which were strictly in the interests of the Soviet Union. The democratic demands ranged from legalization of all nationalist and democratic parties, and the release of political prisoners, to the trial of political cases by non-military courts, and greater syndicalist activities. The demands related to Soviet interests included the withdrawal of Iran from the Central

Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the greater promotion of Iran's relationship with socialist countries.¹⁹

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The tactical and strategic activities promoted by the Tudeh Party were limited to non-violent political and economic measures. It repeated, however, the sacred phrase that the exercise of the people's will was attainable through peaceful or violent means, including armed uprising or revolutionary wars. Nevertheless, it emphasized that "there is no doubt that the Iranian people and our Party seek a peaceful solution to societal contradictions and the peaceful realization of the revolution."

From September 1966, articles in the Tudeh Party's official organ, *Mardom*, avoided using terms such as "armed struggle" and "violent means of struggle". From this date on, the exclusive forms of struggle referred to and promoted by the party were peaceful political and trade union methods. The warming of political relations between the Soviet Union and Iran, marked by Leonid Brezhnev's visit to Tehran in fall 1962 and the Shah's visit to Moscow in June 1965, played an important role in the Tudeh Party's peaceful overtures. In January 1966, Iran and the Soviet Union signed a key industrial cooperation agreement including the building of the Esfahan Steel Mill and a loan of \$288.9 million to Iran. By February 1967, the Soviet Union was exporting \$110 million of arms to Iran.²⁰

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Aside from protecting lucrative trade agreements, another explanation for the Tudeh Party's change of heart could be that it had given up on attracting recruits by harking on its revolutionary credentials.

Starting in November/December 1966, the Tudeh Party had a clearer understanding of the appropriate modes of struggle under the prevalent conditions in Iran. The Tudeh Party presented strikes, demonstrations, trade union activities, and even participating in national election campaigns, as the tools of "removing the obstacles" to obtaining democratic rights. The party argued that through the pursuit of such activities, the government would be obliged to uphold the rights and freedoms stipulated in the Constitution.²¹

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The Tudeh Party believed that in 1966 the Shah's regime was capable of a

peaceful transition to democracy. Therefore, it became resigned to limiting its activities to sporadic verbal criticism of SAVAK and the authorities, the condemnation of human rights abuses, and support for political prisoners in Iran. In practice, its approach to the regime was reconciliatory and non-antagonistic.²²

▪

In July–August 1970, some three months after the appearance of Pouyan’s pamphlet on the necessity of armed struggle, Mardom published a response to a comrade in Iran. The “misguided” comrade had assessed the sociopolitical conditions in Iran as conducive to the overthrow of the regime and had prompted the Tudeh Party to focus all its efforts on this pressing issue. The Tudeh Party’s response was that revolutionary conditions were absent in Iran. The militants in Iran were in turn instructed that their responsibility was to struggle for the attainment of democratic rights and freedoms through peaceful political and trade union activities. They were instructed to desist from all “rushed and adventurist” activities.

The Tudeh Party warned that such adventurist activities would annihilate all organizational cells, put combatants into prisons, and increase the regime’s repression. It argued that extremist activities resulted in greater desperation, fear and suspicion among the people, causing greater difficulty for the party and the movement in making advances in the future. Presenting a clear-cut argument for the survival of the Tudeh Party at all costs, the party called on its members to abide by strict party discipline. Without directly referring to armed struggle, the Tudeh Party categorically denounced “such destructive activities” and rejected them as “damaging and harmful”.²³

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In the summer and fall of 1971, after the attack on Siyahkal, the political mood in Iran radicalized. At this time, however, the Tudeh Party adopted an even more reconciliatory position towards the regime. The party asked Marxist–Leninist revolutionaries to work within the regime’s organizations and invited its members and sympathizers in Iran to join guild organizations, syndicates, village councils, and sports, arts, and literary clubs.²⁴

▪

It conceded that such organizations, especially workers’ and toilers’ associations, were “reactionary and under SAVAK’s close scrutiny”. Nevertheless, it urged Tudeh Party militants to enter such public bodies to “gradually lessen their

reactionary content and change their nature”. The party called on its supporters to use “flexibility, serenity, and alertness” to work in these government-controlled organizations, preparing the masses “to voice and present their demands”. The party warned against provocative, adventurist, and left-wing (chapravaneh) activities in such organizations. It cautioned that such adventurist activities were usually the work of police-affiliated spies or agents provocateurs.²⁵

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By fall 1971, the Tudeh Party’s opposition to armed struggle became manifest. It labelled such activities as “adventurous” and “playing with an uprising”. Those involved in such activities were called “fake revolutionaries”. The Tudeh Party condemned the Siyahkal assault while paying its respect to the bravery of the participants. It denounced the futility of risking the lives of “some of the most selfless revolutionary agents (‘avamel-e enqelabi)”. The party called the Siyahkal combatants “selfless revolutionaries” and in the same breath labelled them as “fake revolutionary utopians”. The efforts of the Marxist revolutionaries was chastised as “opposed to Marxism–Leninism and counter-revolutionary”.²⁶

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The Tudeh Party argued that “land reform”, “industrialization”, and “women’s rights” proved that the ruling class was beating a retreat before the peaceful political and economic struggle of the people under its leadership. The party argued that the development and strengthening of relations between Iran and the socialist countries was an important indicator of the regime’s retreat.²⁷

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In August 1972, one month before the publication of its official anti-Fada’i manifesto, the Tudeh Party lamented the increasing abuse of the people’s rights by the “murderous SAVAK”. It simultaneously expressed its deep regrets over the activities of the “urban guerrillas (cherikha-ye shahri)”. Their activities were characterized as “personal and political suicide”, providing a pretext for the establishment (dastgah) to “intensify repression and terror”. The party reminded the urban guerrillas that they could “expedite the victory of the masses” by relying on a “political organization” instead of engaging in futile activities, which only complicated the conditions for the people’s struggle.²⁸

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The Tudeh Party was inviting the guerrillas to toe the party line.

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The Tudeh Party denounces armed struggle

In the summer of 1972, the Tudeh Party responded to the new wave generated by the activities of the guerrillas. It engaged the theoreticians of armed struggle in a polemical debate. One of the most prolific theoreticians of the Tudeh Party, Farajollah Mizani, who at the time lived in Bulgaria, wrote a sharp criticism of armed struggle as promoted by the works of Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Jazani (Safa' i-Farahani). Mizani made no reference to The Jazani Group's Thesis, written by Zia-Zarifi, as it was published in London, four months after Mizani's pamphlet appeared.

Mizani, born in 1926, belonged to a generation of communists educated in the pro-Soviet tradition of the Tudeh Party where independent thought distinct from the party line was not promoted. Subsequent to the flight of the Tudeh Party's leaders after the 1953 coup, Mizani remained in Iran and along with few others, including Parviz Shahryari, Mohammad-Baqer Mo'meni, and Rahmatollah Jazani (Bijan Jazani's uncle), managed the party's affairs.²⁹

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Eventually, Mizani fled the country in 1956.

In his approximately fifteen-thousand-word pamphlet, *What Are the People's Guerrillas Saying?* (Cherikha-ye khalq cheh migouyand), Mizani responded to those challenging the authority and revolutionary legitimacy of the Tudeh Party. Mizani wrote a rebuttal to the claims that the ideology, teachings, tactics, and strategies of the Tudeh Party were inappropriate for Iran's political problems. In his pamphlet, he defended what he called "classical Marxism–Leninism", as distinct from Ahmadzadeh's "revolutionary Marxism–Leninism" and Jazani's "revolutionary ideology". Mizani, who was writing under the pen name of F.M. Javan, characterized the proponents of armed struggle in Iran as the "worst kind of anarchists", "terrorists", "petty-bourgeois" elements, and followers of

Bakunin.³⁰

▪

For Mizani, the shortcuts to revolution taken by the young revolutionary intellectuals, especially in the name of Marxism–Leninism, were an unforgivable anathema.

Mizani was defending Soviet Marxism–Leninism against the charges that it had lost its revolutionary fervour and had joined the anti-revolutionary camp. He accused the “revolutionary Marxist–Leninists” of discarding the role of the masses in the revolutionary process and instead relying exclusively on “a group of intellectuals”. Mizani charged them with ignoring “Marxist–Leninist principles on the historical-global role of the proletariat” and refuting organizational and mass activities. He argued that they were promoting “terrorism” under the guise of “armed struggle”.³¹

▪

Proper Marxist–Leninist strategy and tactic, he stressed, relied on “providing consciousness to and organizing the working class and all other strata who were to benefit from the revolution”. For Mizani, it was this organized and politically conscious group that could stand up to and oppose the ruling classes.³²

▪

For Mizani, classical Marxism–Leninism was a science. It needed to be arduously learnt. He posited that class struggle took only three forms: ideological, political, and economic. All three forms needed to be employed simultaneously, evenly, and harmoniously.³³

▪

Mizani posited that economic class struggle meant resistance to capitalists by organizing strikes. Based on his assessment of Iran’s social conditions in 1972, ideological, political, and economic struggles were not only viable forms of struggle but were becoming more pressing every day.³⁴

▪

Mizani dismissed the central argument of his opponents that the despotic regime had closed all avenues for legal activities by imposing an absolutist police state. Instead, he insisted that the revolutionary forces should go among the masses and employ the correct methods of struggle “acceptable to the people”. The

outcome, he posited was that “naturally they would find favourable grounds for their activities.”³⁵

▪

According to Mizani, the proponents of armed struggle did not understand the significance of improving the welfare of the toiling masses. Consequently, they did not attach any importance to founding and participating in “professional associations, trade unions, syndicates, newspapers and open, public organizations”.³⁶

▪

Mizani lamented that the guerrillas “did not understand the significance of open, public activities”.³⁷

▪

For him, the “fusing of covert and overt operations” was the best protective shield of clandestine party cells.³⁸

▪

Mizani called on the urban guerrillas to abandon armed struggle and the procurement of bombs and grenades, and instead set up clandestine printing presses, secretly propagating revelatory literature in factories and rural areas.³⁹

▪

Mizani criticized Pouyan’s assessment that the regime’s harsh backlash against armed struggle would draw people to the revolutionary cause. He accused Pouyan of intentionally notching up violence in society. Mizani implicitly rejected the claim that the Shah’s regime had barred the people from exercising their civil liberties and democratic rights. He intimated that Iran was indeed a liberal democracy, and that the police state in place was the result of armed struggle. Repudiating Pouyan’s prognosis of a virtuous cycle of violence leading to an uprising, Mizani wrote, “A worker or the common man on the street would not come to think that fascism was better than bourgeois democracy.”⁴⁰

▪

In his pamphlet, Mizani argued that a small group taking up arms was a futile act, as it would ultimately lead to death and destruction.⁴¹

▪

He posited that the call to arms was “deeply fallacious” as it equated “the rebelliousness rooted in hopelessness of a handful of intellectuals with a social revolution”.⁴²

▪

The theories on armed struggle presented by “ultra-left” groups, according to Mizani, were “anti-Marxist–Leninist theories and lethal for the revolution”.⁴³

▪

To him, the so-called “armed struggle” was in fact nothing but devastating Maoist, ultra-left, and anti-Marxist–Leninist “terrorism and anarchism”.⁴⁴

▪

As if giving advice to a handful of misguided, angry, and impetuous young insurgents, Mizani counselled them repeatedly to exercise the “art of patience” (honar-e shakiba’i).⁴⁵

▪

The art of patience, promoted by Mizani in 1972, resembled the policy of “patience and waiting” (siyasat-e sabr o entezar) adopted by the National Front’s leadership at the behest of Allahyar Saleh in January 1964. According to Mizani’s analysis, “armed struggle” and the “violent road to revolution”, advocated by Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Jazani, were both strategically and tactically erroneous and at odds with the “graceful revolutionary method” (shiveh-ye matin-e enqelabi) of Marxist–Leninists.⁴⁶

▪

From Sofia, this seasoned theoretician of the Tudeh Party was calling for “restraint”, whereas the revolutionary intellectuals in Iran were trying to demonstrate that restraint only strengthened despotism, aggravated the fear and hopelessness of the oppressed people, and eternally delayed overthrowing the Shah’s regime.

In March 1973, the Tudeh Party’s clandestine publication in Iran, Besouy-e Hezb (Towards the Party), published a short article by Zaakhar (pen name). It criticized armed struggle under the guise of analysing the reasons for the failure of the Siyahkal event. Houshang Tizabi (Zaakhar), the editor of Besouy-e Hezb, chastised intellectuals who favoured guerrilla (cheriki) operations for holding unprincipled and anti-party ideas. Such ideas, he argued, led to anti-worker,

adventurous, and unbridled operations which appealed to the petty bourgeoisie. Tizabi called those who had embarked on the road of armed struggle “supporters of terrorism and adventurism”. Following Mizani, Tizabi evoked Lenin, and argued that “the objective and subjective conditions for a revolution were absent in Iran.” Therefore, he concluded, “All forms of armed resistance were doomed to failure.”⁴⁷

▪

The categorical rejection of armed struggle by Mizani and Tizabi, and their support of peaceful political and trade union activities in 1972 and 1973, provided further proof for the revolutionary intellectuals that the Tudeh Party had lost its legitimacy as a revolutionary organization.

▪

What did the revolutionary Marxists think of the Tudeh Party?

Zia-Zarifi held the Tudeh Party’s leadership entirely responsible for the failure to oppose the August 1953 coup. He accused the leadership of lethargy, as well as lacking vigilance and revolutionary courage. According to Zia-Zarifi, had the party’s leadership adopted violent tactics and taken up arms, the coup would not have succeeded.⁴⁸

▪

For Zia-Zarifi, the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party opposed armed struggle, while paying theoretical lip service to it. In his assessment, the Central Committee had become “the veritable ideological and political centre for combatting armed struggle among the forces within the [anti-Shah] movement”.⁴⁹

▪

Through a detailed historical analysis, Zia-Zarifi argued that the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party did “not dare to unabashedly and categorically

denounce armed struggle and declare its disbelief in it”. Zia-Zarifi argued that the party would condone the validity of the idea of armed struggle “in principle” yet argue that the conditions for its realization were unavailable. For Zia-Zarifi, the political position of the Central Committee was one of opportunism in which principles, forthrightness, and sincerity were absent.⁵⁰

▪

Zia-Zarifi posited that rejecting armed struggle and prioritizing political demands was effectively “eternalizing the despotic monarchical regime”. He posited that the Tudeh Party’s Central Committee had slipped into the “whirlpool of ‘bottomless opportunism’”.⁵¹

▪

The party’s reversals and zigzags were linked to the Soviet Union’s shifting political and economic relations with Iran. According to Zia-Zarifi, until 1961, Iran had been the target of the Soviet Union’s harsh political and propaganda attacks. Then, suddenly, from 1961 onwards, Iran was glorified and even politically and economically supported by the Soviet Union.⁵²

▪

Zia-Zarifi contended that the Soviet Union’s support for the “anti-democratic and anti-nationalist (zedd-e melli)” Iranian regime, which buttressed and served imperialism, was incompatible with proletarian internationalism. He subsequently concluded that Soviet foreign policy had slipped into “the cesspool (manjela) of opportunism and political jockeying”. Zia-Zarifi asserted that Soviet policies in Iran were counter to “our national interests as well as the interests of the anti-colonial movement of Middle Eastern people”. He concluded that Soviet foreign policy towards Iran was “in accord with neo-colonial strategies and tactics”.⁵³

▪

Pouyan, on the other hand, did not refer directly to the Tudeh Party in his writing. Indirectly, however, his analysis criticized the legitimacy of a workers’ party in a non-democratic country. The main subject of his writing was to prove that the logic of promoting inaction and self-preservation, for the sake of guaranteeing the ultimate empowerment of the workers’ political party, was flawed. Pouyan’s argument in favour of armed struggle rested on the notion that, in the absence of democratic conditions in Iran, peaceful activities, political or trade union, were impossible and therefore a Communist Party could not be

created. It was for this very reason that the intellectual revolutionaries needed to resort to violence. The creation of a Communist Party required the overthrow of the regime. For Pouyan, Marxist–Leninist groups such as the Tudeh Party, that wished to protect “the idea” of their working-class party by cautiously shielding their forces from harm, were doomed opportunists and defeatists.⁵⁴

▪

Ahmadzadeh called the Tudeh Party “a caricature of a Marxist–Leninist Party”. He accused its leadership of throwing its dedicated and combative members to the executioners after the 1953 coup and fleeing the country.⁵⁵

▪

Ahmadzadeh’s criticism of the Tudeh Party’s praxis was thorough, as was his ideological refutation of its traditional Marxist–Leninist theories and arguments. A proper subtitle for Ahmadzadeh’s treatise may have been “The obsolescence of the Tudeh Party’s ideology”. Ahmadzadeh spoke of the inapplicability of “a series of theoretical formulas”. The Tudeh Party, he contended, had elevated them to the status of “general and unalterable laws”. These formulas, he pleaded, had to be abandoned in favour of “revolutionary Marxism–Leninism”.⁵⁶

▪

Jazani’s criticism of the Tudeh Party was temperate as compared to those of Zia-Zarifi and Ahmadzadeh. Jazani believed that the Tudeh Party had been subject to “structural deviations” and was guilty of certain “shortcomings”.⁵⁷

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He chided the party’s leadership for failing to stand up to the Soviet government’s wrong policies, and their Stalinist deviation. According to Jazani, the leadership followed blindly Soviet policies in Iran, and subsequently lost respect among the masses. However, Jazani did not give up on the Tudeh Party and posited that if it wished to play a considerable part in Iran’s liberation movement, it needed to “fundamentally cleanse and reform” itself. This process, he believed, was attainable by placing “revolutionary ideology” at the core of its activities, and becoming independent of Soviet foreign policy.⁵⁸

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Jazani advised the party to purge its “active cadres”, and educate its members in “revolutionary ideology”.⁵⁹

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Notes

[1](#)

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Masa'el-e Hezbi, shomareh 10, Farvardin 1340.

[2](#)

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Peking Review, 21 December 1962, 1 March 1963, 22 March 1963, 14 and 21 June 1963.

[3](#)

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Peking Review, 13 September 1963, 3 January 1964.

[4](#)

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Peking Review, 3 January 1964.

[5](#)

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Peking Review, 3 January 1964, 3 April 1964.

[6](#)

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Peking Review, 11 January 1963, 15 March 1963.

[7](#)

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H. Showkat, *Negahi az daroun be jonbesh-e chap-e Iran*, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, Tehran: Akhtaran, 1381, pp. 32–33, 45. Hereafter: Showkat, *Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i*.

[8](#)

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Showkat, *Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i*, pp. 28–29, 45.

[9](#)

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Showkat, *Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i*, pp. 419–420.

[10](#)

▪

Mo'aseseh-e tahqiqati va entesharati-ye didgah, Khaterat-e Nouredin Kianouri, Tehran: Entesharat-e ettela'at, 1371, pp. 436, 440. Hereafter, Khaterat-e Nouredin Kianouri.

[11](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, p. 420.

[12](#)

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Khaterat-e Nouredin Kianouri, p. 430.

[13](#)

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Mardom, 1 Esfand 1343. All references to the report are from this source.

[14](#)

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Rah-e qahramiz or the violent path is the same Farsi expression Jazani uses in What a Revolutionary Should Know.

[15](#)

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Mardom, Khordad 1344.

[16](#)

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Mardom, Farvardin 1345.

[17](#)

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The Farsi terms used were: rah-e qahramiz-e mobarezeh, jang-e enqelabi, and mobarezeh-e mosallahaneh.

[18](#)

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Mardom, Ordibehesht 1345.

[19](#)

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Mardom, Shahrivar 1345.

[20](#)

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Ettela'at, 30 Bahman 1345.

[21](#)

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Mardom, Azar 1345.

[22](#)

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Mardom, Ordibehesht, Khordad, Tir 1347.

[23](#)

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Mardom, Mordad 1349.

[24](#)

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Mardom, Khordad 1350.

[25](#)

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Mardom, Khordad 1350.

[26](#)

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Mardom, Mehr 1350.

[27](#)

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Mardom, Mehr 1350.

[28](#)

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Mardom, Mordad 1351.

[29](#)

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Khaterat-e Nouredin Kianouri, p. 351.

[30](#)

▪

F.M. Javan, *Cherikha-ye khalq cheh migouyand*, Stassfurt: Entesharat-e hezb-e tudeh, 1351, pp. 8, 10, 14, 15, 22.

[31](#)

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Javan, pp. 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 14, 19.

[32](#)

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Javan, p. 10.

[33](#)

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Javan, pp. 10, 12.

[34](#)

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Javan, p. 11.

[35](#)

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Javan, p. 16.

[36](#)

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Javan, p. 19.

[37](#)

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Javan, p. 28.

[38](#)

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Javan, p. 28.

[39](#)

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Javan, p. 17.

[40](#)

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Javan, p. 17.

[41](#)

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Javan, p. 24.

[42](#)

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Javan, p. 16.

[43](#)

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Javan, p. 33.

[44](#)

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Javan, p. 8.

[45](#)

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Javan, pp. 28, 30.

[46](#)

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Javan, p. 8.

[47](#)

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Besouy-e Hezb, shomareh 3, Farvardin 1352.

[48](#)

•

Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 2–3.

[49](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 31.

[50](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 34, 36, 38–39.

[51](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 38–39.

[52](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 22.

[53](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 21–22.

[54](#)

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Pouyan, *Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh*, p. 38.

[55](#)

•

Ahmadzadeh, p. 21.

[56](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 22–23.

[57](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 59.

[58](#)

▪

Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 60.

[59](#)

▪

Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 61.

Monarchists, Maoists, and the Tudeh Party in Unison: Armed Struggle is Counter-Revolutionary Adventurism

Between 1963 and 1964, the idea of returning to Iran to pursue the cause of armed struggle had gained strength among radical Iranian students and activists living abroad. The ex-Tudeh Party members in Europe, who had rebelled against the party and formed the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (ROTP), had begun gradually returning to Iran. The fate of those who returned to fight against the regime differed considerably. Parviz Va'ezzadeh-Marja'i, Khosrow Safa'i, Garsivaz Boroumand, Mohammad-Taqi Soleymani, Ma'soumeh Tavafchiyan, and Mahvash Jasemi were killed in clashes, murdered under torture, or liquidated by SAVAK. Syrus Nahavandi became an active SAVAK collaborator, causing the arrest, torture, and death of many of his comrades.¹

Siavush Parsanejad turned himself in before being arrested, participated in a broadcasted interview with the authorities, praised the transformations in Iran, and asked the Shah's forgiveness. However, he never collaborated with SAVAK or the regime.²

Some key members of the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party changed their political position, turned against armed struggle, and became

advocates of the regime once arrested. Some, however, even after long hours of torture, did not break or change their minds.

The fate of Parviz Nikkhah occupied a special place among those associated with ROTP, because of his exceptional standing among left Iranian students abroad. His authority and distinguished reputation had marked the thoughts and actions of others. Many keen eyes were focused on Nikkhah. After his arrest in Tehran, the student movement abroad had celebrated Nikkhah's initial firm resistance and defiance in prison. Nikkhah had become the cause célèbre of the radicalized Iranian students abroad.

Parviz Nikkhah did not show any sign of weakness or irresolution at his trial. On the contrary, he held fast to the fact that he had nothing to do with the attempt on the Shah's life, for which he had been arrested and jailed. Furthermore, he spoke about the importance of human rights and respect for it. He denied having had any inclinations towards socialism, or having been a member of such organizations, and refused the allegation of being against the Shah.³

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During his five years in prison, Nikkhah underwent a change of mind. After his release, and in his letters to his old comrades in Europe, Nikkhah emphasized that his new understanding of the situation in Iran truly reflected an inner transformation. At this time, still under the watchful eyes of SAVAK, Nikkhah informed his friends that what he had written in the press and said on television were "his own words" and the outcome of his own analysis.⁴

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It will never be known if Nikkhah would have become a supporter of the Shah's policies had he not been arrested and imprisoned. Kourosh Lasha'i, a militant of ROTP, had a similar change of heart after two weeks of imprisonment, but he had the opportunity to leave Iran after the revolution to tell his story. He confided in Hamid Showkat that, had he not been tortured, he would have most probably remained steadfast to his revolutionary ideas and would not have recanted.⁵

▪

Nikkhah and Lasha'i, the ex-Marxist–Leninist revolutionaries, opened a new front promoting peaceful change and reconciliation with the regime while condemning armed struggle. They became the new reformists within the regime.

It is highly doubtful that their message ever found favour with the youth. Their new stance, by choice or by compulsion, sounded very much like the Tudeh Party's support of peaceful coexistence, competition, and transition.

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For Nikkhah the red revolution turned white

Nikkhah had gone to England for his university studies in January 1958. He had become active in left student politics while studying physics at Manchester College of Science and Technology, and subsequently at Imperial College.⁶

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Nikkhah was a Marxist, already involved with the Tudeh Party, before becoming interested in Maoism. As he and his like-minded comrades became impatient with the Tudeh Party's cautious and passive reformism, they became attracted to guerrilla warfare in Iran. This was well before the important December 1965 split from the Tudeh Party by its veterans, Ahmad Qasemi, Gholam-Hoseyn Foroutan, and 'Abbas Saqa'i. It was the Cuban and Algerian experience that attracted Nikkhah and his colleagues to armed struggle.⁷

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Before the founding of the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (ROTP), Nikkhah returned to Iran in July 1963 to study and obtain a firm grasp of the existing sociopolitical conditions while preparing the ground "for guerrilla warfare in Iran".⁸

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On 10 April 1965, Reza Shamsabadi, a palace guard, opened fire on the Shah at the Marble Palace, and was gunned down before he could hurt the Shah.⁹

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Twelve days later, Nikkhah was arrested by SAVAK and framed for his alleged

involvement in the assassination attempt on the Shah's life. Even though Nikkhah had played no role in any aspect of the assassination attempt, his Marxist and Maoist background provided an excellent excuse for SAVAK to draw him into a sinister fictive plot. The attempt on the Shah's life was presented to Iranians as a communist plot masterminded by subversive Iranians, educated in that ever-scheming and mysterious country, England.

Having served five years out of his ten-year prison term, Nikkhah gradually came to negotiate his freedom with the authorities. He was released from Borujerd prison in late spring of 1970, and quickly became a media figure, explaining the deep and structural transformations in Iran. Nikkhah urged Iranian students abroad to return and participate in the historical transformation of their country. The regime showcased Nikkhah as the young educated Marxist intellectual who had seen the light, had abandoned violence, and joined the Shah's path of the White Revolution.

The new political celebrity addressed Iranians in a much-publicized press conference covered by the National Iranian Radio and Television. The content of Nikkhah's interview was immediately splashed on the front page of Tehran's dailies, accompanied by his handsome picture. He spoke about how best to serve Iran, the opposition to the regime and those who benefitted from such activities, and finally the Shah's role. Nikkhah described his negative impression of the country while he had been living abroad. He then detailed his eye-opening experience of the glaring achievements in the country once he had returned. Nikkhah argued that "national harmony and solidarity" were the essential factors assuring Iran's progress, while class confrontations were replete with sociopolitical dangers. He maintained that the recent events in Iran demonstrated a significant developmental leap, rupturing with the old and underdeveloped past and surging towards a modern future.

Nikkhah argued that domestic polarization, resorting to violence and any divisive activity, would play into the hands of foreigners. He accused the overseas opposition groups of being completely unaware of the realities in Iran. The opponents of the regime were in his eyes likely pawns in the hands of foreign powers. Nikkhah chastised and dismissed the leadership of the Tudeh Party as conniving opportunists and lackeys. Addressing his old Maoist comrades, he insisted that the *idée fixe* of peasant guerrilla wars in Iran was misplaced and childish. Nikkhah praised the monarch as a wise politician who looked at problems from the perspective of a nationalist. He reminded his

audience that progress and development during the Shah's reign could not be ignored and supported the thesis that Iran could not function like other, Western democracies.¹⁰

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According to Nikkhah's formulation, there were no objective or subjective conditions for a revolution. The Shah's reforms, he believed, had satisfied all socio-economic demands, and removed all grounds for discontent and confrontation. Nikkhah argued that, since Iran could not provide democratic rights, the Shah wished to "create mass institutions", thereby pushing the country towards "political and economic democracy". This desirable end, he argued, would not be attained unless all Iranians united, cooperated, and neutralized foreign plots and provocations. In the name of political and economic democracy, Nikkhah called on all Iranians to unite and support a regime that openly acknowledged its unwillingness to provide democratic rights.

The Iranian press of Tuesday, 25 May 1971 reported the death of three prominent revolutionaries who had been on SAVAK's famous list of nine wanted guerrillas. In two separate attacks on guerrilla safe houses, Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Eskandar Sadeqinejad, and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri had been killed. On Wednesday, 26 May 1971, Ettela'at published an article by Parviz Nikkhah alongside his picture on page eleven.

The article, "Imperialism and the Ideal of National Unity", was said to have been written in response to the intentional omission of the term "Persian Gulf" by the BBC and the Guardian. However, the publication of such an article, in the middle of heightened tension between the guerrillas and the regime, did not seem innocent. Nikkhah's article repeated what he had said a year before. He denounced the vices of imperialism and how it wished to prevent the progress of developing countries. Imperialism, Nikkhah posited, benefitted from dogmatism and "sharp emotions", sowing division in society. In an interesting theoretical somersault, Nikkhah argued that when it suits its interests, imperialism becomes the defender of anti-imperialist movements.

The fault, Nikkhah asserted, was partially with Iran's intellectual community, who relied consistently on the "actions and words of the other" and engaged in "barren and rowdy slogans".¹¹

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Nikkhah argued that the proliferation of parties, after the departure of Reza Shah in 1941, was one of the reasons why foreign powers found it easier to intervene in Iranian affairs. This was a theme dear to the Shah's heart. He criticized "the so-called National Front" and accused its members of amassing wealth, while looking to the West for answers. Having accused the Tudeh Party of leading Iranian intellectuals to their "demise and annihilation", Nikkhah warned that "new political groups overseas" had united forces to bring about "destruction and damage". He condemned the "horrible historical experience of the Iranian intellectual community" organized "in extremist parties and organizations" and accused them of failing to move towards "the ideal of national unity".

Nikkhah presented the Shah as the symbol of Iran's national unity and independence. He disassociated the social, political, and economic shortcomings of Iranian society from "Iran's constitutional monarchy". He claimed that against the interests of the imperialists, the Shah was "constantly trying to prevent all spiritual and material divisions in society". Addressing the guerrillas, the opposition, and political dissidents, Nikkhah called on them to come to their senses. He counselled that they should opt for "negotiation" instead of "conspiracy" and "wise reflection" instead of "dogmatism".

Sounding almost like the Shah addressing his subjects, Nikkhah wrote, "think more wisely and more realistically" and do not "become fruitlessly provoked and incited, falling into blind rebellion". He called on the intellectual community, the students, and the youth to "exercise forgiveness and patience" thereby reducing internal tensions and paving the way for the country's progress.

Nikkhah's last few lines gave away the reason for his article. He warned that, irrespective of the differences of opinion over "the tactics of dealing with society's problems", it was "certain that terrorism polarized society, injected violence into social relations and burned all bridges that could foster and enrich social relations". He concluded that terrorism was "directly in the service of colonial interests", and that armed struggle had become the equivalent of terrorism. Nikkhah's analysis and position overlapped with the Shah's, for whom the Siyahkal attack had been the pathetic work of madmen who were undoubtedly controlled and managed by foreigners.¹²

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Nikkhah was echoing the Shah's punchlines. His emphasis on the destructive danger of political dissent for national unity, the mercenary status of all

opposition groups, and the irrational lunacy of the guerrillas undermined his authority as an independent intellectual. By obliging Nikkhah to repeat the regime's official line verbatim, SAVAK destroyed the image which it had tried to give him. After this article, it was hard to believe that Nikkhah was an independent reformist intellectual who had had a spontaneous change of mind.

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Kouros Lasha'i's rejection of romanticism and embrace of realism

Kouros Lasha'i left Iran for Germany in November 1955 and began his medical studies at the University of Munich. He became involved in student politics and taught Marxist theory in a study group of mainly Tudeh Party members or sympathizers.¹³

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Lasha'i must have shown enough enthusiasm for the Tudeh Party to be granted a meeting with Nouredin Kianouri, a prominent figure of the party in 1961. Lasha'i maintained close ties with the Tudeh Party and, at their behest, went to Iran as part of a relief team attending the victims of the Bo'in Zahra earthquake in September 1962.¹⁴

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While collaborating with the Tudeh Party, Lasha'i fell gradually under the spell of Parviz Nikkhah's charisma during the London and Paris meetings of the Confederation of Iranian Students in Europe. Lasha'i considered Nikkhah as "a prophet, and the rest, his apostles". Under the influence of Nikkhah, sometime in the spring of 1964, Lasha'i joined a group of Tudeh Party members and sympathizers intent on splitting from the party.¹⁵

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Fed up with the "defeatist and collaborationist" position of the Tudeh Party, the young rebels, Mohsen Rezvani, Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, Bijan Hekmat, and

Lasha'i, had decided to found the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party (ROTP).¹⁶

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The main objective of the new organization, as mapped out by its spiritual founder, Nikkhah, before his departure, was to send members and the leadership to Iran to commence armed struggle.¹⁷

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At the first official gathering of ROTP in November 1964, Lasha'i was elected to the four-man leadership team.¹⁸

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He subsequently travelled three or four times to China, attending a political-military training camp, visiting rural communes, learning acupuncture, and getting a first-hand account of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹

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From 1968 till fall 1972, when he returned to Iran, Lasha'i travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Qatar, and Kuwait. He spent some two years with Jalal Talebani in Kurdistan, fought alongside the Kurdish peshmerga (combatants), and won their respect.²⁰

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To organize a revolutionary network in the Persian Gulf, he spent some six months as a simple metal worker in Qatar.²¹

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Before leaving for Iran, Lasha'i had the reputation of a courageous revolutionary.²²

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Within some two months of his arrival, around November 1972, while looking for a place to rent, Lasha'i was arrested as he was leaving a real estate agency.²³

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After four days of torture, Lasha'i divulged his name, and within a week of his arrest he decided to cooperate and stay alive.²⁴

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Once he proposed to his jailers the idea of participating in a televised interview, the torture stopped. Lasha'i claimed that Sabeti visited him in prison to discuss his interview.²⁵

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According to Lasha'i, it was Nikkhah who read and approved the text of his interview. Lasha'i, surrounded by seven journalists, and flanked by Iraj Gorgin, Director of the News Division of National Iranian Radio and Television Organization, participated in a two-and-a-half-hour press conference, aired on television. The leading Iranian dailies published this interview on 30 December 1972 along with Lasha'i's handsome picture, dressed in Kurdish garb.²⁶

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After his interview, Lasha'i was taken directly to his parents' house and did not return to prison.²⁷

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Lasha'i's interview resembled Nikkhah's, as both were organized by SAVAK's experts in psychological warfare. The goal was to dissuade the mushrooming revolutionary Marxists at home from engaging in armed struggle. The crux of both interviews was that, in view of the transformations in Iran, pursuing armed struggle was futile, self-destructive, and doomed to failure. The interviews were political recantations dressed in "self-criticism".

In his lengthy interview, Lasha'i highlighted the idea that, as a professional revolutionary, he had come to certain conclusions which he felt obliged to share with his audience. He warned Iranians both in and outside the country not to follow his misguided path. The primal mistake of those young politicized Iranians overseas, he argued, was being disconnected from the realities and transformations in Iran. He posited that reaching radical political conclusions, such as launching armed struggle based on anachronistic theories superimposed on existing realities, was the "most disastrous kind of idealism", leading to "horrendous bloodletting". Lasha'i abhorred "the wasted grey-matter and manpower, which could be used in the construction" of the country. The consensus over engaging in armed struggle in Iran, Lasha'i argued, was based on the false notion that progress in the country was a lie. He warned the blinded "romantics" that their endeavours would fail before "the hard and pitiless reality". The "launching of guerrilla warfare", he predicted, was destined for defeat.

To prove his point, Lasha'i enumerated "the hard realities" that rendered armed struggle in Iran ineffective. He referred to land reform, and the dismantling of the feudal system, as the "most significant event in the country", which the "idealists" did not want to understand and accept. For Lasha'i the literacy campaign, and the implementation of "self-assisting and self-determining institutions" in rural Iran, were signs of real democracy. Lasha'i awkwardly tried to make a case for the Shah's concept of democracy. He argued that "democracy is a relative concept" and that in Iran the interest of the "toiling masses, the millions of farmers and workers" had been given priority over the interest of the tiny intellectual community. He lashed out at intellectuals, for thinking of democracy only in terms of "irresponsible freedom of expression".

Whereas Nikkhah had directly referred to and praised the Shah, Lasha'i intimated his importance as "a spiritual pillar of support" and "a force of progressive nationalism", without naming him. He praised Iran's "independent and positive" foreign policy and called on the people to support it with all their power. Lasha'i envisaged two paths for intellectuals. One was the path which Che Guevara had promoted. This option, Lasha'i labelled as false, erroneous (kazeb), and condemned to failure right from its inception. The other path, which he called true and productive, meant for intellectuals to go to the masses, pool their efforts, and help the people "increase the national product and implement health and cultural projects".

At a time when the guerrillas were gaining strength and popularity, Lasha'i argued that "we need to place our little guns on the table and pick up tools to make good on the opportunity that history has provided us to renew our society." Lasha'i advised the government to reach out to the students abroad, explain the projects and developments in the country, and genuinely solicit their participation.

Finally, returning to his main subject, Lasha'i took a last stab at armed struggle. Implying that armed struggle had failed to attract recruits, he pointed out that during the past two years in Iran, no one had followed those who fired the first shots. He posited that Che Guevara's failed attempt in Bolivia was the proof of his separation from the people. He concluded that copying Guevara's bad example would only lead to a dead-end.²⁸

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The Tudeh Party: We told you so

Realizing how closely his arguments resembled those of the Tudeh Party, Lasha'i commented that "now it is possible that the Tudeh Party will turn around, and say, we told you so from the beginning." He left his comment without a further explanation or analysis. In May 1973, Ehsan Tabari, the ideologue of the Tudeh Party, and a prominent member of the Central Committee, wrote a biting article called "Ultra-Leftism on a Slippery Slope", under the pen name E. Sepehr.²⁹

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In his article, Tabari tried to demonstrate that the outcome of ultra-leftism – read armed struggle – was nothing but "right-wing backpedalling". Leftism, he argued, was rooted in "subjectivism and voluntarism". Tabari referred to Ahmadzadeh who had popularized Debray's concept of the "small engine" in Iran. He poked fun at "voluntarists" who believed that a "jump-starting small engine", in isolation from the masses, could effectuate a social revolution. Tabari mocked the idea that a "lethargic and terrified society" awaited the "heroic spectacle" (honar nama'i-ye gahremananeh) of the adventurers to become energized. For Tabari, those who criticized the Tudeh Party and the CPSU for their lack of revolutionary engagement, were echoing CIA directives promoting leftist anti-communism.

Having made the traditional Tudeh Party case against armed struggle, Tabari referred to Nikkhah and Lasha'i as prime examples of ultra-leftism who had subsequently become the spokesmen of the regime. Tabari deduced that ultra-leftism and ultra-rightism were two sides of the same coin, and that proponents of armed struggle were no different from the supporters of the Shah. He derided those "dogmatists" who, in the name of defending Marxist principles, considered any kind of "creative Marxism" and "tactical flexibility" (narmesh-e taktiky) as disbelief (kufr) and apostasy (elhad).

The ideological volte-face of Nikkhah and Lasha'i provided the ideal

opportunity for Tabari to settle old scores with rebels who had called to arms, belittled the Tudeh Party, and become the idols of Iranian radicals in the West. Tabari wished to demonstrate that ultra-leftism leading to ultra-rightism proved that any deviation from the Tudeh Party line was doomed to failure. He branded those engaged in armed struggle as “traitors to the revolution” and “counter-revolutionaries”. The alleged “ultra-leftists”, he asserted, took advantage of those who had “favourable social and psychological backgrounds” and misled them into “futile adventurism”. The outcome of armed struggle, he asserted, was first “confusion” and then “surrender”, “despair”, or “pacifism”. By 1973, the regime, the Tudeh Party, and a few political converts of the Maoist Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party were all in agreement that armed struggle in Iran was doomed adventurism, and its practitioners were doing a grave disservice to their comrades and the country.

Notes

[1](#)

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On Syrus Nahavandi see Mohammad-Hoseyn Khosropanah in *Negah-e no*, no. 91, Pa'iz 1390; and B. Mortazavi, *Halqeh gomshodeh*, Cologne: Forouq, 1393.

[2](#)

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Ettela'at, 27, 28 Ordibehesht 1349.

[3](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Parviz Nikkhah, Tehran: Markaz-e barrasi-e asnad-e tarikhi-e vezerat-e ettela'at, 1385, pp. 246, 271, 275, 280, 283.

[4](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Parviz Nikkhah, pp. 283, 287.

[5](#)

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Showkat, *Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i*, p. 201.

[6](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Parviz Nikkhah, pp. 1, 60, 44, 71, 99.

[7](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Parviz Nikkhah, pp. 169–170; H. Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, vol. 1, Saarbrücken: Baztab, 1368, p. 120. Hereafter: Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani.

[8](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Parviz Nikkhah, p. 163; Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, p. 32.

[9](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Parviz Nikkhah, p. 113.

[10](#)

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Ettela'at, 20 Khordad 1349.

[11](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 5 Khordad 1350.

[12](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 20 Ordibehesht 1350.

[13](#)

▪

Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lashaʿi, pp. 20, 26.

[14](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lashaʿi, pp. 27–28.

[15](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lashaʿi, pp. 32–33, 45.

[16](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lashaʿi, pp. 43–44.

[17](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, pp. 32–33. Rezvani argues that before his arrest in Iran, Nikkhah did not believe in armed resistance. See: H. Showkat, *Negahi az daroun be jonbesh-e chap-e Iran*, Goftegou ba Mohsen Rezvani, Cologne: Mortazavi, 1384, pp. 62–65. Hereafter: Showkat, Goftegou ba Mohsen Rezvani.

[18](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, p. 43.

[19](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, pp. 49, 56, 60, 110.

[20](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mohsen Rezvani, p. 192.

[21](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, pp. 145, 153, 162, 163, 168, 174.

[22](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mohsen Rezvani, p. 192.

[23](#)

▪

Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, pp. 183, 190.

[24](#)

▪

Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, pp. 193, 194, 202.

[25](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, p. 206.

[26](#)

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Ettela'at, 9 Dey 1351.

[27](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, pp. 207, 214.

[28](#)

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All references to this interview, Ettela'at, 9 Dey 1351.

[29](#)

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Mardom, Ordibehesht 1352, mavara chap dar sarashib.

Armed Struggle and Marxist Canonists

After the 1963 Sino-Soviet ideological debate, revolutionary change had taken on a different meaning. The Tudeh Party had renounced violence and any military action against the regime. It not only opposed revolution-making but labelled it as anti-Marxist–Leninist. The Tudeh Party, therefore, needed to prove that Marxism–Leninism was an ideology of peaceful transition to power. The party did not expect its sympathizers to ask how such a position differed from those of Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, the so-called renegades of all Communist Parties.

To make a case against armed struggle, the Tudeh Party evoked the dictums of the founders of Marxism–Leninism. In his rebuttal of the guerrillas, Mizani had quoted Marx and Lenin profusely. He had relied on them to demonstrate that the proletariat, and subsequently the proletariat–peasant alliance, constituted the real revolutionary class and should, therefore, lead the revolutionary movement. Referring to Marx and Lenin, Mizani had charged that the armed struggle movement in Iran was deprived of a class understanding of revolution.¹

The vanguardist approach of the armed struggle movement, he had argued, was contrary to Marxist–Leninist teachings and essentially anarchist.²

For their part, Zia-Zarifi, Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Jazani placed the responsibility of triggering the anti-despotic movement on the vanguard, namely

the revolutionary intellectuals. By 1970, a plethora of political groups and organizations throughout the world were anchoring their arguments in and explaining their actions based on Marxism–Leninism. Conflicting passages and references were quoted ad infinitum from the Marxist–Leninist pantheon, supporting opposite sides on the use and timing of armed struggle. A broad survey of Marxist thinking on armed struggle is in place to provide a theoretical baseline. The positions adopted by Marxist–Leninist pioneers, classical and revolutionary, furnish a backdrop against which arguments by Iranian Marxist–Leninist theoreticians on armed struggle could be assessed.

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Historical determinism or revolutionary voluntarism?

Marx, Engels, Trotsky, and Lenin described political processes as tightly synchronized with economic developments. This was in accord with historical materialism. For the proponents of orthodox or deterministic Marxism, growth and maturity of the economic forces of production would bring about an automatic sociopolitical change, rendering violence and bloodletting unnecessary. According to orthodox Marxism, historical transformations can neither be rushed nor delayed.

While Marx and Engels for the most part expressed their trust in the scientific precision of a smooth transition, they did, however, sometimes express enthusiasm for the use of violence to effectuate political change. This position opened the door to a violent or revolutionary interpretation of Marxism in contrast to orthodox or deterministic Marxism. Once we get to the later generation of Marxists represented by Mao and Guevara, it was the gun, and not economics, that became the prime mover of political change.

Marxist–Leninists diverge on the issue of revolutionary restraint versus provoking a revolution. Some emphasize the necessity of peacefully waiting for the maturing of the broad revolutionary forces and the right revolutionary

moment. In this process, the emphasis is placed on building workers' organizations and a mass party. Others promote creating revolutionary conditions through armed insurgency and audacity. The burning issue of where Marxism stands on revolutionary restraint or provocation may never be categorically settled in favour of one or the other position even among the founders of communism. For Marxists focusing on and operating in bourgeois European countries, the notion of political change following economic causes, even "in the last resort", makes more sense than for Marxists living in autocratic dictatorships. The inclination to incite insurgence and violence corresponds with the degree of availability or absence of democratic rights and freedoms.

Ever since February 1848, the well-known concluding lines of The Communist Manifesto, endorsing if not extolling the "forceful overthrow of all existing social conditions", has lent itself to the promotion of "revolution-making". Forceful overthrow implies violent means. Auguste Blanqui, the French revolutionary, who believed that a group of dedicated armed revolutionaries could make a revolution in the interest of the people, helped support a voluntarist revolutionary tendency within Marxism. Blanqui's call for violent action, as a moral responsibility in times of political despotism, remains a spectre haunting classical Marxism. Blanquism challenges orthodox Marxism's claim of liberating the working classes and saving the oppressed through a clean and almost bloodless transition.

Blanqui, the controversial non-Marxian revolutionary Republican, was a key player in the Paris Commune. Marx referred to him as "the real leader" of "the proletarian party", while Engels called him "a political revolutionary".³

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Blanqui was less concerned with the complex economic analysis of Marx and Engels as the harbinger of sociopolitical change. For him, the revolutionary needed to act by engaging in armed struggle. The members of his organization took the following straightforward oath: "In the name of the republic, I swear eternal hatred to all kings, all aristocrats, to all of humanity's oppressors. I swear absolute devotion to the people, fraternity to all men, aside from aristocrats; I swear to punish traitors; I promise to give my life, to go to the scaffold if this sacrifice is necessary to bring about the reign of popular sovereignty and equality."⁴

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In his later writings, Blanqui was adamant that, in the final analysis, it was not peaceful political and guild activities, but “arms and organization” which were the “decisive elements of progress, the serious method of putting an end to poverty”. Blanqui made fun of workers’ demonstrations and rallies as “ridiculous strolls in the streets”, resulting in death and destitution. In turn, he emphasized that “who has iron has bread”.⁵

▪

The serious method of struggle, for Blanqui, was that of armed struggle. In an 1866 proclamation to the Parisians, he wrote, “To arms, Parisians! Enough is enough! You received freedom from your fathers; you will not leave servitude to your sons.”⁶

▪

According to Karl Kautsky, the orthodox Marxist, Blanqui’s teachings had “enormous attraction for men of action” during the Paris Commune. Kautsky observed that Blanquism “found more acceptance among the intellectuals, especially students, than among the workmen”.⁷

▪

As if speaking of the Iranian Marxist revolutionaries of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kautsky called the Blanquists “a student party”, and argued that they devoted their attention exclusively to “the political struggle against the existing powers of State”. Kautsky reminded the voluntarist political activists that, “if economic liberation must precede the political, then, logically, every kind of political activity on the part of the proletariat is equally useless, of whatever kind it may be.”⁸

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Marx and Engels: Wavering over the role of violence?

In November 1848, Marx described the events in Vienna as a bloody and

“purposeless massacre” of the “working and thinking proletarians”. Marx, writing in Cologne, thundered that “the very cannibalism of the counterrevolution will convince the nations that there is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society, and the bloody birth throes of the new society, can be shortened, simplified, and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror”.⁹

▪

The thirty-year-old Marx insisted on “revolutionary terror” as the only response to the state’s bloody repression of the people.

In May 1849, Marx returned to “revolutionary terror”, lamenting the closing of his paper, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, due to the state of siege introduced in Cologne. The government accused Marx’s paper of inciting its readers to “violent revolutions”. Marx in turn threatened the “Royal government” and wrote, “When our turn comes, we shall not make excuses for the terror. But the royal terrorists, the terrorists by the grace of God and the law, are in practice brutal, disdainful, and mean, in theory cowardly, secretive, and deceitful, and in both respects disreputable.”¹⁰

▪

Once again Marx was responding to state intimidation and royal terror with the people’s power to intimidate, namely armed struggle.

In July 1870, Marx first warned that the overthrow of the government would be “a folly”, and called on the French workers to “calmly and resolutely” strive “for the work of their own class organization”.¹¹

▪

This was Marx leaning towards mass struggle, rather than rushing to overthrow the government. Eight months later, after the 18 March 1871 uprising of the Paris Commune, Marx wavered on the issue of violence and armed struggle. He called the Commune a “heroic folly”, greeted it with enthusiasm as “the self-sacrificing champion of France”, and gave it his full support.¹²

▪

Marx emphasized that “armed Paris was the only serious obstacle in the way of the counter-revolutionary conspiracy.” The armed insurrection was lauded as “the glorious harbinger of a new society” and “its martyrs” were praised by

Marx for being eternally “enshrined in the great heart of the working class”.¹³

▪

Even at fifty-three, Marx was moved by the Parisian insurrection and armed seizure of temporary power.

In 1879, some four years before his death, Marx reflected on the role of violence in sociopolitical change. Marx had once suggested that, in the United States, Britain, and perhaps France, a bloody revolution could be avoided, while it would be unavoidable in Russia, Germany, Austria, and perhaps Italy. When asked about his comment, Marx chose only to address the statement attributed to him in relation to Russia, Germany, Austria, and Italy. He confirmed the statement attributed to him, but added: “Those revolutions will be made by the majority. No revolution can be made by a party, but by a nation.”¹⁴

▪

Marx was clearly indicating that, in his opinion, the revolution could neither be conducted by a small voluntarist group nor a vanguard party, but by the majority, by a nation. This political position was in line with Marx’s materialist conception of history, emphasizing the importance of objective and subjective conditions reaching maturity before a revolution, and most importantly that the development of capitalism would result in a polarized society composed of a proletarian majority and a bourgeois minority.

In the same interview, after the Paris Commune had been invoked, the interviewer asked Marx if believers in socialism advocated “assassination and bloodshed”. Marx responded that “no great movement has ever been inaugurated without bloodshed.”¹⁵

▪

Marx’s statement could be interpreted as an observation on past events. It could also be a testament to his view that peaceful means of struggle, the outcome of a technically perfect unravelling of historical materialism, may prove to be inadequate, necessitating violent methods of struggle.

The classical view of Marxism is pretty much unanimous on the importance of the revolutionary moment and the necessary revolutionary conditions. For orthodox Marxists, political and social revolutions needed to ripen first and could not be stirred or provoked. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique*

of Political Economy, written in 1859, Marx left little room for the role of human will and voluntarist interpretations of “social revolutions”.¹⁶

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In this passage, Marx referred to men entering into relations of production that are “definite”, “necessary”, and “independent of their will”. These relations of production subsequently corresponded to, or were locked into, “a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production” and the “era of social revolution” began only when “the material productive forces of society came into conflict with existing relations of production”.¹⁷

•

One could argue that Marx’s argument about social revolutions did not necessarily apply to political revolutions.

Marx’s important scheme of social change has a definite air of precision, leaving little room for audacity and will. Elsewhere and well before writing the “Preface”, Marx had reiterated his anti-voluntarist position. In 1852, he wrote, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under given circumstances directly encountered and inherited from the past.”¹⁸

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These powerful words could invalidate any attempt at expediting the revolution or entitling revolutionaries to act outside the well-determined boundaries of prevailing economic and political conditions.

In June 1847, some three years after having met Marx in Paris, the twenty-seven-year-old Engels first paid his allegiance to the almost mechanical view of the material conception of history. He expressed his belief in the maturing of the social and economic conditions and rejected the valiant attempts of a small group of revolution-makers. Engels wrote, “We are convinced not only of the uselessness, but even of the harmfulness of all conspiracies. We are also aware that revolutions are not made deliberately and arbitrarily, but that everywhere and at all times, they are the necessary consequence of circumstances which are not in any way whatever dependent either on the will or on the leadership of individual parties or of whole classes.”¹⁹

•

Engels condemned revolution through any kind of “push” or exogenous human agency, most of all that of clandestine conspiratorial groups. He sent a clear signal that revolutions needed no midwives; they happened when all necessary economic conditions had matured.

However, Engels reminded his readers that under conditions when the working-class movement was constantly under siege, smooth transitions may prove to be impossible. Engels added, “But we also see that the development of the proletariat in almost all countries of the world is forcibly repressed by the possessing classes ... If, in the end, the oppressed proletariat is thus driven into a revolution, then we will defend the cause of the proletariat just as well by our deeds as now by our words.”²⁰

▪

Engels’s comment on the possibility of the proletariat being “driven into revolution” opened a window of opportunity for political initiative, irrespective of the ironclad economic laws governing the unfolding of history. Whereas the first part of Engels’s statement indicated that history could not be taken by the ear and pushed forward, the second part conceded that, where democratic rights and freedoms were violated, the proletariat were justified in making revolution. Even though he seemed to reject the Blanquist methods, Engels, like Marx, provided an argument for fast-forwarding historical change.

In 1885, two years after Marx’s death, the sixty-five-year-old Engels wrote a letter to Vera Zasulich, who had tried to assassinate the governor of St. Petersburg in 1878. In this important letter, Engels justified how a little push (the little engine) could create a revolution in Russia. This letter demonstrates that, for Engels as for Marx, revolutionary restraint due to the precision of the materialist conception of history was not a general scientific law applicable to all times, places, and conditions. In this letter, Engels argued that since the murder of Alexander II, on 13 March 1881, Russia was experiencing exceptional circumstances, “where it is possible for a handful of people to make a revolution”.²¹

▪

Engels argued that “one small push” could make the system “come crashing down”. Resurrecting the spirit of vanguardist violent action, Engels wrote, “Well now, if ever Blanquism – the phantasy of overturning an entire society through the action of a small conspiracy – had a certain justification for its existence, that

is certainly in Petersburg.”²²

▪

Engels wrote, “Once the spark has been put to the powder, once the forces have been released and national energy has been transformed from potential into kinetic energy the people who laid the spark to the mine will be swept away by the explosion, which will be a thousand times as strong as themselves and which will seek its vent where it can, according as the economic forces and resistances determine”.²³

▪

Engels did emphasize that the events ensuing from the Blanquist push would unfold according to the economic forces and resistances, yet he did advise the Russian revolutionaries to intervene and provoke the fall of the regime. He absolved Blanqui’s vanguardism, and his method of armed struggle, at least in St. Petersburg.

Engels’s advice to Zasulich not only presaged the vanguardist formula employed by revolutionary intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s, but openly approved of it as a correct revolutionary Marxist method of struggle under exceptional circumstances. Clearly at the time, Engels did not believe that the classical objective conditions for the revolution were available in Russia. If Engels condoned Blanquist action in Russia, why not approve of such a method in all politically despotic countries like Russia? One could even argue that Engels was the forefather of the “small engine” idea popularized by Debray and adopted by Ahmadzadeh.

Ten years later, at the age of seventy-four, Engels reverted to his original orthodox position in relation to violence and revolutionary change. In 1895, shortly before his death, Engels engaged in a mea culpa. In the introduction to Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France*, Engels referred to their (Marx and Engels) common positive view of the anti-monarchical 1848 revolutions in Europe. He wrote, “But we, too, have been shown to have been wrong by history, which has revealed our point of view of that time to have been an illusion.” Most importantly, Engels added: “The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete from every point of view.”²⁴

▪

The 1848 mode of struggle that Engels was referring to consisted of armed

struggle, the “forceful overthrow” referred to in the Communist Manifesto and the “revolutionary terror” Marx referred to in his 1848 articles in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.

Engels once again argued that the reason he and Marx had erred was that, contrary to their analysis, the “state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the removal of capitalist production”.²⁵

▪

Engels, therefore, concluded that back in 1848, it was “impossible” for the revolutionaries to “win social reconstruction by a simple surprise attack”. For Engels, revolution-making, while the economic forces remained immature, would only yield “violent outbreaks”, without “the prospect of a final solution”. The final solution for Engels was not the removal of a dictatorship, but that of capitalism.

Engels spoke with bitterness about the Paris Commune, and repeated that the experience proved that “the rule of the working class” was once again impossible in 1871. He wrote, “The victory which came as a gift in 1871 remained just as unfruitful as the surprise attack of 1848.”²⁶

▪

It seemed as if the formulations by Marx and Engels were concerned with social revolutions, hence the intricate relation between the economic and political relation. However, every once in a while, the two fathers of scientific socialism were distracted, and even encouraged and tempted with the political revolutions around them. At times, this confused them. Was the Paris Commune, a political revolution, supposed to become a social revolution?

In 1895, Engels concluded that “the conditions for the struggle had essentially changed.” He declared that the old style of rebellion conducted through “street fights with barricades” was “to a considerable extent obsolete”. In the concluding remarks of his work, Engels set aside all hesitation about his assessment of the old insurrection tactics and settled the score with his own past flirtations with armed struggle and Blanquist tactics. Engels wrote, “The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past.” Engels was effectively purging Marxism from the method of struggle based on “conspiracies, insurrections and

all other revolutionary actions”.²⁷

▪

Instead, Engels took the bold step of identifying “universal suffrage” as the appropriate method of struggle, not only in Germany and France, but also in Austria and Russia. The implicit revisionism in Engels’s analysis was not lost to him. He wrote, “The irony of world history turns everything upside down. We, the ‘revolutionaries’, the ‘rebels’ – we are thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and revolt.” Engels’s last work made a compelling case for the futility of armed struggle in certain countries and an equally strong case for the use of purely legal and political methods of struggle from a Marxist perspective. Did Engels really believe that Russia in 1895 provided democratic rights and liberties in which universal suffrage could voice the will of the majority? Did Engels believe that before the first Duma (1906), universal suffrage would be in any way meaningful? One could assume that Lenin certainly did not think so.

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Lenin on violence, unequivocal?

In *The State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin argued that “violent revolution lies at the root of all the teachings of Marx and Engels.”²⁸

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This provided authoritative support for the position of Marxist revolutionaries, impatient with the lengthy process of fulfilling the objective and subjective conditions of the revolution. In the same work, Lenin had praised Marx for not condemning the “untimely” movement of the Paris Commune and thereby defending revolutionary action before the fulfilment of revolutionary conditions.²⁹

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In his initial writings on the topic, however, Lenin was cautious about privileging political agitation among the labouring classes over the use of violence, although he did not reject the use of terror or military campaigns at the right moment. In “Where to Begin” (1901), he warned against the “infatuation with terror”, worrying that it would damage organizational leadership of the labouring classes. He wrote, “terror can never be a regular military operation; at best it can only serve as one of the methods employed in a decisive assault.”³⁰

▪

In his writings, Lenin referred to the dangers and disadvantages of political violence, as well as its necessity. Lenin’s approach to various forms of armed struggle highlighted the importance he attached to political expediency based on evolving concrete political conditions. The case in point was the important debate between Lenin and the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs) over tactics and the appropriate method of conducting the struggle against the despotic Tsarist regime.

The debate demonstrates how Lenin wavered between condemning armed struggle by a small group and supporting such activities depending on the evolving political conditions and alignment of forces in Russia. This debate and its outcome are highly relevant to the situation and condition of the revolutionary intellectuals in Iran of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It demonstrates that Marxism–Leninism could be invoked to promote both waiting for the ripe moment of revolution (determinism), a Tudeh Party position, and revolution-making (voluntarism), a Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Zia-Zarifi position. Jazani’s position could be categorized as theoretically suspended in the middle and eventually leaning towards the deterministic position.

The Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries or the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs) had been founded in 1901. Starting in 1902, the SRs possessed a clandestine “Combat Organization” charged with individual assassination of Tsarist government officials.³¹

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In the 1903 programme of the SRs, “terroristic activity” consisted of “destroying the most harmful people in the government”, “defending the party against espionage”, and “punishing the perpetrators of the notable cases of violence and arbitrariness on the part of the government”.³²

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The purpose of such activities was to “undermine the prestige of the government’s power” and “demonstrate steadily the possibility of struggle against the government”. Terrorist activities also aimed at arousing “the revolutionary spirit of the people and their confidence in the success of the cause” and giving “shape and direction to the forces fit and trained to carry on the fight”.³³

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The SRs stressed that terrorism was only one aspect of their struggle, and it was most effective when integrated with working among the masses.³⁴

▪

The employment of terror tactics by the SRs ebbed and flowed historically as the Tsar embraced and rejected civil liberties and democratic rights.

In April 1902, the SRs had stated: “We advocate terrorism, not in place of work among the masses, but precisely for and simultaneously with that work.” Nevertheless, in August 1902, Lenin wrote a piece against the SRs, accusing them of revolutionary adventurism and terrorism. Lenin believed that irrespective of their claims, the SRs were in fact “relegating work among the masses into the background or disorganizing it by their advocacy of terrorism”.³⁵

▪

In this article, Lenin criticized the SRs for “including terrorism in their program and advocating it ... as a means of struggle”, and “destroying ties between socialist work and the mass of the revolutionary class”. He argued against the idea that terrorism forced people, against their will, to think politically.³⁶

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Lenin felt that armed struggle overshadowed or diverted attention from “work among the masses” and that it was “in no way connected with the masses”.³⁷

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He therefore announced that “terror at the present time is by no means suggested,” and ruled that “such a means of struggle is inappropriate and unsuitable.”³⁸

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Based on his analysis of the political conditions in 1902 in Russia, Lenin was

calling for “a properly organized movement of the proletariat and the revolutionaries” to “overthrow the autocratic rule”.³⁹

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Lenin’s position shifted dramatically after 22 January 1905 (Bloody Sunday), when government forces opened fire indiscriminately on a demonstration of peaceful protesters. Lenin’s reaction on the following day was categorical. He wrote, “The uprising has begun. Force against force. Street fighting is raging ... Rivers of blood are flowing, the civil war for freedom is blazing up.”⁴⁰

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After this repressive episode Lenin became “uncompromising on the necessity of force and violence to overthrow the autocracy”.⁴¹

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Russia’s Bloody Sunday of 1905 was somewhat similar to Iran’s 5 June 1963 uprising in favour of Khomeyni. It convinced the opposition of the futility of the peaceful method of struggle against despotism.

By February 1905, the political conditions in Russia had evolved. Lenin was in exile, writing about the possibility of an agreement or a “fighting unity” between the Social Democratic Party and the SRs. In this important piece, “A Militant Agreement for the Uprising”, Lenin leaned towards incorporating armed struggle. He argued that for the SRs “intelligentsia terrorism and the mass movement of the working class were separate, and this separateness deprived them of their full force.”⁴²

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Lenin now maintained that the SRs’ acknowledgement of the fusion of “revolutionary terrorism” and “the mass movement” had opened the possibility of reaching “a militant agreement for the uprising” to overthrow the autocracy. In fact, it was Lenin’s position which had changed, not that of the SRs.

In March 1906, Lenin presented a “tactical platform” to the Unity Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in Stockholm. In his proposal, Lenin, who had lambasted the SRs for adventurism and terrorism in 1902, proposed the formation of “guerrilla squads”, carrying out “fighting guerrilla operations”. Times had evolved, and so had Lenin’s position on methods of struggle. In 1906, Lenin recommended that the newly founded guerrilla squads

should be affiliated with the party, and train leaders for the time of insurrection. Lenin expected them to conduct “offensive and military operations”, “destroy the government, police and military machinery”, and “seize funds belonging to the enemy”, or engage in bank robberies to “meet the needs of insurrection”. Lenin called for the guerrilla operations to be under the party’s control.⁴³

▪

A few months later, Lenin explained his reasoning for opposing terror in 1902 and for approving military operations in 1906. He rejoiced at the attack on Riga Central Prison by some seventy revolutionaries, and observed, “fortunately the time has passed when revolution was ‘made’ by individual revolutionary terrorists, because the people were not revolutionary. The bomb has ceased to be the weapon of the solitary ‘bomb thrower’ and is becoming an essential weapon of the people.” Sensing a national uprising, and the approach of “the final and decisive battle”, Lenin called for manufacturing bombs “everywhere and anywhere”.⁴⁴

▪

Lenin justified his support for the formation of guerrilla squads by arguing that, when repression was rampant and “peaceful general strike proved inadequate”, guerrilla operations inevitably served to “disorganize the enemy’s force and pave the way for future open and mass armed operations”.⁴⁵

▪

In September 1906, Lenin examined the “question of forms of struggle”. He posited that forms of struggle used by revolutionaries were conditional upon “the mass struggle in progress” and could not be confined to any specific form. Lenin observed that “new forms of struggle unknown to the participants of a given period, inevitably arise as the given social situation changes.”⁴⁶

▪

Prescribing a particular form of struggle, Lenin suggested, required “making a detailed examination of the concrete situation of the given moment at the given stage of its development”. Lenin first cited major movements among the workers, peasants, and soldiers in Russia between 1896 and 1906. He then argued that armed struggle had been at first the exclusive form of struggle of “vagabonds”, “lumpenproletariat”, “anarchists”, and “Blanquists”. He considered such acts as “disorganizing the movement” and “injuring the revolution” as they demoralized the workers and repelled “wide strata of the

population”.

But now, Lenin was supporting the guerrilla movement, because it was time for the old forms of political struggle to blend with the new violent form. He wrote, “The old Russian terrorism was the affair of the intellectual conspirator; today as a general rule guerrilla warfare is waged by the worker combatant, or simply by the unemployed worker.” The difference in the political consciousness and purpose of the person wielding the gun and the bomb led Lenin to dismiss as “trite” those who called such activities Blanquist or anarchist. The change in circumstances, he argued, rendered the absence of guerrilla warfare, rather than its presence, detrimental to organizational work and morale among the working classes. Lenin argued that “Guerrilla warfare is an inevitable form of struggle at a time when the mass movement had actually reached a point of uprising.”

On the heels of widespread sociopolitical unrest sweeping across Russia in late 1904 and 1905, involving strikes by workers, unrest among peasants, and mutinies among the armed forces, it seemed natural for Lenin to place emphasis on the military power and operations of the opposition. The evolution of events in Russia prompted his shift towards violence to guarantee the mass uprising’s success.

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Trotsky: Dissonance between intellectual revolutionary consciousness and backward economic conditions invites violence

In 1909, Leon Trotsky tried to explain the reason why the Socialists-Revolutionaries in Russia resorted to violence, or “individual terrorism as a method of political revolution”.⁴⁷

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Trotsky’s thoughts were equally relevant to the conditions that prevailed in many non-democratic countries, including Iran in 1970. In the absence of the prospect

for mass movements, the idea of armed struggle simmered.

In a 1909 article entitled “The Bankruptcy of Individual Terrorism”, Trotsky opined that “terror as a method of political revolution” was a Russian phenomenon. Still a Menshevik, Trotsky approached the topic from an orthodox Marxist position. He argued that, whereas in “older bourgeois societies of Europe”, revolutionary ideas had developed in tandem with the development of the economic forces – “the broad revolutionary forces” – this process was absent in Russia. He sharply observed that “in Russia, the intelligentsia gained access to the ready-made cultural and political ideas of the West, and had their thinking revolutionized before the economic development of the country had given birth to serious revolutionary classes from which they could get support.”⁴⁸

▪

Trotsky believed that there was a disparity between the exogenously determined revolutionary consciousness of the intelligentsia and the indigenous backward economic realities of Russia. It was this disparity that convinced revolutionaries “to multiply their revolutionary enthusiasm by the explosive force of nitro-glycerine”.⁴⁹

▪

Trotsky pitted the violence-prone SRs against the Marxist “theoreticians of mass struggle”. According to Trotsky, the SRs’ “hermetic” conspiratorial organization prevented them from carrying out “agitational and organizational work among the masses”. He accused the SRs of discarding other forms of struggle in favour of terror. The SRs, he submitted, considered armed struggle as the “absolute” form of struggle. Trotsky demonstrated what happened in societies where the revolutionary consciousness of the intelligentsia ran ahead of the economic realities. In such situations, the revolutionaries felt obliged to abandon the unrealizable classical Marxian formulas to expedite freedom from despotism. This applied as much to Russia as it did to the Iranian scene of the early 1970s. For the sake of liberating their people, the revolutionary Marxists were prepared to part ways with orthodox Marxism.

As a revolutionary practitioner, Trotsky was caught in the same dilemma as Marx, Engels, and Lenin. When the forces of revolution were resisted by and confronted with powerful forces of counter-revolution, resorting to arms became imperative. In 1919, Karl Kautsky, the custodian of orthodox Marxism, wrote *Terrorism and Communism*. Kautsky criticized the new revolutionary Soviet

government, and accused the Bolsheviks of dictatorship, terror, militarism, bloodletting, and violating the “Marxist method”. He accused them also of forcing the revolution in a backward Russia characterized by a peasant society and of returning the old Tsarist conditions “only in some worse form”.⁵⁰

▪

For Kautsky, a true believer in the pure material conception of history, “the Marxist method” implied the peaceful rule of the majority, relying on the parliamentary method, and rejecting violence. Kautsky wrote, “As we have only the two alternatives – democracy or civil war – I myself draw the conclusion that wherever Socialism does not appear to be possible on a democratic basis, and where the majority of the population rejects it, its time has not yet fully come.” He posited that “Bolshevism, on the other hand, argues that Socialism can only be introduced by being forced on a majority by a minority, and such can happen only through dictatorship and civil war.”⁵¹

▪

In 1920, in a polemical pamphlet also called *Terrorism and Communism*, Trotsky responded to Kautsky’s accusations. By this time, Trotsky had already joined the Bolsheviks, and was the People’s Commissar of Military and Naval Affairs of the Soviet Union. Setting aside the dislike for violence he had expressed in 1909, Trotsky now argued that “peaceful demonstration of folded arms” and the “general strike” were incapable of overthrowing military monarchies.⁵²

▪

Once the movement enters the phase of “armed insurrection”, Trotsky argued, the “bloody price” that “the revolutionary class has to pay for power” will be fixed. He emphasized that in order to seize power, “the proletariat will have not only to be killed but also to kill – of this no serious revolutionary ever had any doubt.”⁵³

▪

Trotsky was talking about a stage when the proletariat became involved in the movement and not when the revolutionary intellectuals were carrying the main burden of the movement. Violence, therefore, was unavoidable for “serious revolutionaries”. Trotsky added that for the revolutionary class to attain its ends, all methods at its disposal, including “armed uprising” and “terrorism”, were permitted.⁵⁴

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Consequently, he called on the true revolutionaries to organize themselves, “openly, half-openly, and purely conspiratorially”. The transformation in Trotsky’s position was like that of Lenin. As the sociopolitical conditions changed, the appropriate forms of struggle had to change.

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Armed Struggle and Marxist Revolutionaries

For orthodox Marxists, democratic and socialist revolutions generally occurred once the objective and subjective conditions were ripe. However, as undemocratic conditions persisted, and the revolutionary conditions failed to mature, pressure increased on the politically radicalized to make revolution. The revolutionary Marxists, heirs of Blanqui, liberated themselves from the constraints of mechanical coordinations and correspondences. The ideas of Mao, and primarily Guevara, as well as the revolutionary experience of China and Cuba, strongly resonated with Iranian politicized circles. Later, however, the Iranian revolutionaries found themselves equally if not more attracted to the experience of Latin American urban revolutionaries, especially those of the Tupamaros in Uruguay and Marighella's National Liberation Action in Brazil. Discussions, debates, and writings in Iranian revolutionary circles often echoed the experiences and ideas of international Marxist revolutionaries.

As early as January 1963, the Paris-based National Front publication, Iran-e Azad, began publishing excerpts of Ernesto Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*. The translation from the French was by Hamoun, a pen name for 'Ali Shakeri, a member of Iran-e Azad's editorial board.¹

The French edition of this book had been published in April 1962 by the left publishing house of François Maspero. The first edition of Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* in English was published in 1961 by Monthly Review Press. The English edition of the book was available for sale in Tehran as early as

1963.²

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By December 1966, a thirty-five-page typed manuscript of Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare in Farsi* was changing hands at Tehran's Polytechnic University for recruitment purposes.³

•

In the spring of 1966, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, a member of the original Jazani Group, remembered coming across a Farsi translation of Guevara's work *Cuba: Exceptional Case or Vanguard in the Struggle against Colonialism*. Even though the manuscript was in Safa'i-Farahani's handwriting, Kianzad believes that he was most probably not its translator.⁴

•

In this important work written in April 1961, Che ardently argued that the Cuban experience was by no means unique and singular, and it could, therefore, serve as a model for other anti-dictatorial and anti-imperialist movements. Shortly before the Iranian press gave coverage to the news of Debray's trial and Che's death, the full text of Che's "Message to the Tricontinental" (April 1967) was translated into Farsi by Houshang Vaziri and published in the September 1967 issue of *Ferdowsi* magazine.⁵

•

This publication was one of the very few journals widely read by Iranian intellectuals and members of the opposition.

In the pages of *Ferdowsi*, adorned with the classic picture of Che, Iranian intellectuals and revolutionaries read about the necessity of armed struggle, and that the struggle ahead would be long and harsh. Che had written that, for the guerrillas to succeed, they needed to transform themselves "into effective, violent, selective and cold killing machines". Vaziri attenuated Che's bluntness by translating it as guerrillas needing to transform themselves into "automatic killing machines of the enemy".⁶

•

Mao's works had also found their way to Iran, primarily through the Farsi language programme of Peking Radio. Between 1965 and 1967, a Farsi language programme, run by Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, broadcast twice a day from

Peking, once at 19:00 hours and again at 21:00 hours local Iran time. Translating Mao's works constituted an important aspect of Khanbaba-Tehrani's responsibilities in Peking.⁷

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The Iranian revolutionaries, at the time, were keen listeners of Peking Radio. As soon as it had started broadcasting the works of Mao, 'Abbas Meftahi, an influential revolutionary figure, recorded them and later transcribed them with the help of 'Ali Tolou'. According to 'Abbas Meftahi, it was because of these broadcasts that Mao's works were much more readily available in Farsi than any other Marxist work.⁸

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By 1969, Meftahi had delegated the transcription of Mao's works to Ahmad Farhoudi, originally a member of Meftahi's Sari branch of Marxist revolutionaries.⁹

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Bijan Hirmanpour remembered diligently recording the entire broadcasts, then typing the works and preparing them in a pamphlet form.¹⁰

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Kianzad recalled that by spring 1965, he had come across some of Mao's works, and by 1966, even though he did not see eye to eye with the Chinese ideological line, he had read works on the Chinese Revolution.¹¹

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Qasem Rashidi, a member of the political branch of Jazani's Group, remembered that by 1966, he had read handwritten translations of Mao's On Contradiction.¹²

-

Despite the very different kinds of revolutionary movement they were involved in, both Mao and Che firmly believed in the supremacy of armed struggle. They were involved with socialist revolutions in countries where the working class was hardly a class "in itself", let alone "for itself". In both China and Cuba, due to the underdeveloped state of the economic forces, which Guevara called "deficient economic development", waiting for a socialist revolution, in the tradition of orthodox Marxists, implied an indefinite postponement of change. In the absence of ripened economic forces, armed struggle was a viable method of

breaking out of the deadlock. In China, the people's war took twenty years to succeed, while in Cuba armed struggle bore fruit in two years. Both movements, however, believed that the main arena for their guerrilla operations had to be the countryside and placed primary importance on peasants as their potential reservoir of revolutionaries.

In the aftermath of Che's capture and execution, on 9 October 1967, while leading a rural guerrilla offensive in Bolivia, a different kind of guerrilla movement appeared on the Latin American continent. This movement was fuelled by the increasing violation of democratic rights and freedoms along with systematic imprisonment and torture of the opposition in Latin America. Urban guerrilla warfare shifted interest away from the rural and impacted the analysis and calculations of revolutionaries worldwide. The Latin American urban revolutionary Marxists were again not interested in the orthodox teachings of the founders of Marxism–Leninism. To assure “a certain minimum political understanding”, they called on their recruits to read specific works of Che and other Latin American revolutionaries, while bypassing the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and even Mao.¹³

▪

The Tupamaros, or the Uruguayan National Liberation Movement, was initially a non-violent political organization of heterodox radical students. The thirty-five-year-old Raul Sendic, a Marxist law student, played a leading role in the creation of this organization. The focus of this group, in 1966, had been to organize the sugar-cane workers in the northern rural areas, to obtain shorter work hours and press for land reform. Reacting to the state of emergency imposed by President Jorge Pacheco Areco in June 1968, and the suppression of all political rights and freedoms, the Tupamaros transitioned to armed struggle. They focused on urban bank robberies, kidnappings, and attacks on security forces.¹⁴

▪

Back in 1964, in conversations with the future members of the Tupamaros, Régis Debray had “insisted that any attempt at urban guerrilla warfare was doomed to fail, and that Uruguayan radicals ought to model their revolution on Cuba's Sierra Maestra foco”. The Tupamaros, however, decided to go their own way and employ urban guerrilla tactics.¹⁵

▪

For the Tupamaros, action was primordial and spoke much louder than words. Employing “armed propaganda”, as their medium of political expression, the Tupamaros aimed at raising consciousness among the people, humiliating the government, and gradually building mass support for their movement.¹⁶

▪

Some two thousand kilometres away from Montevideo (Uruguay), Carlos Marighella (Marighela) created the National Liberation Action in Brasilia. Marighella opted for armed struggle in 1968, almost in tandem with the shift of the Tupamaros to armed resistance. A marked characteristic of Marighella’s school of thought was his emphasis on the urban foco, or a small group of guerrillas, without rejecting the Cuban model of rural guerrilla warfare.¹⁷

▪

Remaining steadfast to Che’s motto that revolutionaries did not have to wait for the revolutionary conditions, but could create them in the process of making revolution, the Tupamaros and Marighella chose to launch their struggle in urban areas. Yet as Marighella argued, this geographically different method of struggle was “a continuation of the heroic struggle launched by Che Guevara in Bolivia”.¹⁸

▪

It was in 1967 that the newspaper-reading public in Iran received news of the guerrilla activities in Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela.¹⁹

▪

By October 1968, the more intellectual Iranian magazines reported on the increasing shift of guerrilla activities in Latin America, from rural and forest areas to the urban areas.²⁰

▪

A month later, Iranian dailies gave news of the guerrilla activities by Brazil’s National Liberation Action, without mentioning Marighella’s name.²¹

▪

In 1968, when recruiting new members to the cause of armed struggle in Iran, Ghafour Hasanpour spoke to the potential guerrillas about “the people’s armed struggle in China”, “the Cuban revolution”, “the guerrilla war in the Sierra”, and “the urban guerrilla experiences” in Latin American countries. By October 1970,

or some nine months after the publication of Marighella's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, Iranian revolutionaries were referring to Marighella's methods and the forms of struggle employed by the Tupamaros.²²

▪

Iranian revolutionaries traced their lineage to the international Marxist revolutionary movement. They read the works of the pioneers available to them, derived different lessons from each, and concocted them in the manner which they thought best suited their political conditions and objectives.

▪

Mao Tse-tung's revolutionary authority

At twenty-seven, Mao reflected on the plausibility of peaceful transition to socialism through education. He posed a key question about the suffocating and unbearable political, economic, and social conditions in China. In 1920–1921, before joining the Communist Party, Mao had asked, “If we use peaceful means to attain the goal of communism, when will we finally achieve it? Let us assume that a century will be required, a century marked by the unceasing groans of the proletariat.”²³

▪

In August 1937, having been a revolutionary practitioner for at least ten years, and having concluded the Long March in October 1935, Mao was engaged in the Second Sino-Japanese War. This is when he wrote his well-known work *On Contradiction*, where he laid bare the reality that “revolutions and revolutionary wars” were “inevitable in class society”. Without revolutions, Mao argued, reactionary ruling classes would not be overthrown, and people would not be able “to win political power”.²⁴

▪

In his famous work *On Guerrilla Warfare*, written in 1937, Mao wrote, “In a war

of revolutionary character, guerrilla operations are a necessary part,” and yet, doomed to failure if the political goals and objectives of the movement do “not coincide with the aspirations of the people”. The success of the guerrilla movement hinged on the “sympathy, co-operation and assistance of the people”, predominantly peasants.²⁵

▪

Mao argued that there was no profound difference between the Chinese peasant and a soldier. All they needed to do was to leave their farms, pick up the gun, and become soldiers organized in military units.²⁶

▪

For Mao, leading the peasants’ struggle for land was the key to mobilizing a broad-based mass struggle and winning the revolutionary struggle.²⁷

▪

Probably the most straightforward and well-known reference to the importance of armed struggle in the process of revolution belongs to Mao. In Problems of War and Strategy (November 1938), Mao gave the gun an unrivalled position and status in the revolutionary movement: “Every Communist must grasp the truth, ‘Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.’”²⁸

▪

Even though he added that the party should command the gun, Mao was clear that embarking on armed struggle preceded the creation of the party. For Mao, the experience of the Chinese communists demonstrated that under the protection of the gun, party organizations, cadres, schools, and mass organizations could be created.²⁹

▪

The sociopolitical and economic realities of China and its long and complex revolutionary experience made the Chinese model of revolution attractive to the Vietnamese revolutionaries. However, its specificities limited its application to other countries. Furthermore, the semi-feudal and semi-colonial condition of China, at the time of its revolution, made its particular revolutionary experience less relevant to many countries such as Iran. Iranian revolutionaries, who were reading Mao’s 1938 treatise On Protracted War, could not draw tangible lessons applicable to their conditions and predicaments. Mao’s writings on the war of resistance against Japan were not relevant to the Iran of late 1969 and early

1970.

The important legacy of Mao, for revolutionary Marxists, was four-fold. First, Mao's systematic laudation of revolutionary struggle and the key role of the gun in the revolutionary process validated the revolutionary Marxists' method of struggle. Second, Mao's reminder that revolution was necessary for the overthrow of autocracy bolstered the position of the partisans of launching armed struggle, irrespective of the maturity of revolutionary conditions. Third, Mao's emphasis on the fact that guerrilla warfare was an integral aspect of the revolutionary war reassured the revolutionaries of the veracity of their path. Fourth, Mao's vocal support for revolutionary political change, at a time when the Soviet Union was promoting peaceful transitions in the early 1960s, boosted the morale of Marxist revolutionaries, providing them with ideological justification.

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Che Guevara's revolution-making to overthrow dictators

By around age twenty-five, Guevara had travelled extensively throughout Central and South America. He was appalled at the poverty, hunger, and disease of the inhabitants and equally indignant at the presence of US economic interests in the region. The socially conscious Argentinian doctor arrived in Guatemala in late December of 1953. In June 1954, during his stay in Guatemala, a US coup removed the democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman.

Years later, while reminiscing on his first meeting with Fidel Castro (August 1955) in Mexico, Guevara recounted, "In reality, after the experience I went through, my long walks throughout all of Latin America and the Guatemalan closing, not much was needed to convince me to join any revolution against a tyrant."³⁰

-

Guevara's Guatemalan experience was the last straw. The humanitarian doctor morphed into a revolutionary and then a Marxist.

In April 1958, some sixteen months after having landed on Cuban soil, Guevara was living in the Sierra Maestra mountains. When asked by a journalist what he was doing in Cuba, Che Guevara responded, "I am here simply because I think the only way to liberate America from dictators is by overthrowing them – helping their downfall in any way, the more directly the better."³¹

▪

The idea of ushering in social justice through socialism dovetailed with his anti-despotic and anti-imperialist drive. In Iran of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this emotional, moral, and ideological journey of the revolutionaries resembled that of Che.

In April 1967, eight years after the victory of the Cuban Revolution and eighteen months after Che resigned all his official posts, he sent a message to the Havana Tricontinental Conference. Che had set out to overthrow tyrants in Africa and South America and had landed in Bolivia to launch an armed struggle. In his message, he insisted that the strategic end of struggle against oppression and imperialism was the "real liberation of all people, a liberation that will be brought about in most cases through armed struggle".

For Guevara, the revolution would "almost certainly have the character of becoming a socialist revolution". He reminded delegates of opposition movements from the three continents not to harbour any illusions "that freedom can be obtained without fighting". In the midst of an arduous guerrilla war in Bolivia, Che informed his revolutionary comrades-in-arms, gathered in Havana, that the oppressors had imposed a harsh and long struggle on them, and that they had no other alternative than to prepare for it and to undertake it.³²

▪

For Guevara, the final strategic objective of a revolutionary movement was taking power, overthrowing the tyrannical force oppressing the people, and imposing power with a socialist character. Responding to the crucial question of whether it was possible to attain this end through peaceful methods, Guevara did not categorically reject the peaceful method, but he posited that "we emphatically answer that, in the great majority of cases, this is not possible."³³

▪

Aware of the Soviet emphasis on “the three peaceful” methods, and intent on not alienating the Latin American Communist Parties aligned with the Soviet Union, Guevara did not wholly brush aside the notion of peaceful transition, but gradually argued against it before abandoning it altogether. He reluctantly conceded that, as “classical Marxist authors” have argued, “there exists, nevertheless some possibility of peaceful transition.” Guevara added that, in his assessment, every minute that passed by made “a peaceful commitment more difficult”. He affirmed that “the peaceful road is almost non-existent in America.”³⁴

▪

When rulers hold on to power “against the will of the people”, and when they employ brute force to destroy the people, Guevara announced that then the people need to “use force and determination” and “reply with the will to fight to the very last man”.³⁵

▪

Arguing for the paramount and fundamental role of “guerrilla action”, and against any other method as the main tactic of struggle, Guevara described America as a continent “preparing to fight”. Calling on the oppressed to make revolution, he made it be known that “the sooner the people take up arms and bring their machetes down on” their exploiters, “the better”.³⁶

▪

Guevara rejected the criticism that the proponents of guerrilla warfare abandoned mass struggle. On the contrary, he warned those going into action that “without the population’s support”, the initial movement would lead to “inevitable disaster”.³⁷

▪

Yet, his dedication to making revolution prevented him from heeding his own warning when embarking on his Congo and then Bolivian campaigns.

For Guevara, in the absence of democratic rights and freedoms provided by a bourgeois-democratic state, the peaceful transition of power promoted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and its satellite parties, was wishful thinking. He reproached those progressive elements who confused tactical with strategic objectives and thereby sapped the people’s energy by opting for peaceful methods. Why participate in elections, demonstrations, and strikes

when the rules of the game could change at any moment? Guevara called those who promoted a peaceful transition “the educated and the prudent”, who were putting the brakes on the people’s movement. Lashing out at hesitant and reluctant sympathizers, and members of Latin American communist parties following the CPSU line, Guevara wrote, “The masses know that ‘the role of Job is not for the revolutionary,’ so they prepare for battle.”³⁸

▪

After the victory of the Cuban Revolution, and before its leaders announced their adherence to Marxism and the construction of socialism, Guevara wrote *Guerrilla Warfare*. This work, written in the winter of 1961, should not be confused with Che’s *Guerrilla Warfare: A Method*, written in September 1963 and containing some of the main themes in his 1961 work. There is a stark difference in the language of these two works. In the first one, there is no trace of Marxian jargon, or any reference to Marx, socialism, and the proletariat. In his second work, after the announcement of Cuba’s adherence to Marxism, the language is replete with Marxian references. The appeal of these two texts, to revolutionaries worldwide, lay in the clarity with which Che broke off with orthodox or classical Marxism, and gave full reign to human will and audacity.

In these works, Che articulated the simple notion that waiting for the maturing of the conventional preconditions for revolution was a pseudo-revolutionary position, prolonging injustice and the oppression of tyrants. Che summed up three lessons from the Cuban Revolution. First, armed forces of oppressive regimes could be defeated by popular forces, through insurrection. Second, revolutionaries can create the conditions for making a revolution and, therefore, it was no longer necessary to wait for the revolutionary conditions to ripen. Finally, the countryside constituted the ideal location for armed struggle.³⁹

▪

Che elaborated on two interlaced points in relation to making revolution. It was “pseudo-revolutionaries” with their “defeatist attitude”, he maintained, who preached inactivity. He accused them of sitting and waiting “until in some mechanical way all necessary objective and subjective conditions” were aligned, “without working to accelerate them”. Che also submitted that under dictatorships, and in the absence of democratic rights and freedoms, once “the forces of oppression” usurped political power “against established law”, they automatically broke the law and violated peace.⁴⁰

▪

In Guerrilla Warfare, he argued that as long as a government had come to power through “some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not”, and maintained “at least an appearance of constitutional legality”, guerrilla activities could not be promoted “since the possibilities of peaceful struggle” had “not yet been exhausted”.⁴¹

▪

According to Che, only after all peaceful means of struggle had been blocked and stymied by a dictatorial regime, armed struggle became a necessity and the guerrilla fighter became the “armed vanguard of the fighting people”.⁴²

▪

The theoreticians of armed struggle in Iran all began their arguments from the premise that the post-coup regime had no political legitimacy.

In Guerrilla Warfare: A Method, Che argued that violence was not “the monopoly of the exploiters” and urged the exploited to use violence when the moment came. He supported his claim with a quote from José Martí: “He who wages war in a country, when he can avoid it, is a criminal, just as he who fails to promote war, which cannot be avoided, is a criminal.”⁴³

▪

Che came to consider violence as “the midwife of new societies”. He urged the revolutionaries to unleash it “at that precise moment in which the leaders have found the most favourable circumstances”.⁴⁴

▪

The identification of the “revolutionary moment” was transferred from the impersonal, mechanical objective and subjective conditions to the personal discretion of revolutionary leaders.

Free from waiting for the “revolutionary moment”, the revolutionaries required volition, conviction in final victory, audacity, discipline, and selflessness to engage in armed struggle, and mobilize the masses for the overthrow of dictators.⁴⁵

▪

Che redefined the duty of revolutionaries. He urged them “not to wait for the change in the correlation of forces”, but “to make revolution”.⁴⁶

▪

The guerrilla zone of operation, according to Che, was initially the countryside, where the revolutionaries would begin their fight under the banner of “agrarian reform”.⁴⁷

▪

For him, the active support of the peasants of the region, and their gradual enlisting in the armed struggle, was the prerequisite of the guerrillas’ success.⁴⁸

▪

Che claimed that Cuba had shown “the way of the armed popular fight against armies supposed to be invincible”.⁴⁹

▪

But how was the vanguard born and the armed struggle launched? According to Che’s prescription, the guerrilla unit had to start in absolute secrecy. Members of a small revolutionary “nucleus” had to meet in secret as a conspiratorial group. They needed to take shape “without mass support or knowledge”.⁵⁰

▪

Their first contact with the masses would occur when the guerrillas struck their blow. The initial conspiratorial “nucleus” was charged with choosing “places favourable for guerrilla warfare” before they would “start taking action”.⁵¹

▪

To make revolution, according to the Cuban experience, revolutionaries had to strike first.

One essential commonality between the Chinese and Cuban experience, as emphasized by both Mao and Guevara, was that both movements relied heavily on a peasantry hungry for land. The promise of agrarian reform, as a fundamental goal of the respective movements, resonated with the aspirations of the landless and tenant farmers in both China and Cuba. Both Mao and Guevara identified the peasantry as the backbone of their movements. The task of the guerrilla movements was to gradually convert the peasant population into a mass revolutionary army.

The Iranian revolutionaries of the late 1960s and early 1970s were totally deprived of potential revolutionaries in the rural areas. Under pressure from

successive US administrations since the 1953 coup, and in response to a serious push from the Kennedy administration, Iran had embarked on land reform under the premiership of 'Ali Amini. The implementation of this important socio-economic measure began in March 1962, under the auspices of Hasan Arsanjani, Amini's zealous Minister of Agriculture. By 1966, some 500,000 Iranian peasant families had benefitted from land reform.⁵²

▪

For Iranian revolutionaries who wished to reproduce the Chinese and Cuban experience in Iran, a most important ingredient of this successful recipe, namely a disgruntled peasantry, was missing.

▪

Carlos Marighella: Unleashing violence to end dictatorial violence

Carlos Marighella was a staunch Communist Party activist for thirty-three years.⁵³

▪

At fifty-six, pained by the inertia and compliance of the Brazilian Communist Party in the face of the military dictatorship's increasing repression since 1964, Marighella opted for armed struggle. He radically parted ways with the party in 1967 and founded National Liberation Action (NLA), a Brazilian urban guerrilla organization in 1968. The NLA conducted numerous urban operations, including raids on barracks, police stations, and banks. Their widely reported operation involved the kidnappings of the US Ambassador in Brazil and the Japanese Consul-General in São Paulo. In return for the freedom of their hostages they obtained the liberation of twenty political prisoners of different tendencies. On 4 November 1969, Marighella was killed in a gun battle at the age of fifty-nine.

Marighella wrote letters, articles, declarations, and communiques on his political experience in the Brazilian Communist Party, and later, on the various aspects of

armed struggle in Brazil. In June 1969, he wrote the *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* or “Handbook of Urban Guerrilla Warfare”, which quickly became a gospel of urban revolutionaries. After Marighella’s death, this work first appeared in both English and French in the bi-monthly *Tricontinental* (January–February 1970) published in Havana.

In the same year, a collection of Marighella’s writings was published in France under the title of *For the Liberation of Brazil*. The collection included his most insurrectional work, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. The compilation was first banned, then republished. To force the hands of French authorities, a group of twenty-four prominent French publishing houses put their names to this publication.⁵⁴

▪

A more comprehensive version of the French edition, including more works in addition to the controversial *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, was published in English in 1971.⁵⁵

▪

For Marighella, the April 1964 military takeover in Brazil was a violent watershed, further aggravated in December 1968 by a “fascist coup”, giving dictatorial powers to the military President.⁵⁶

▪

At this historical juncture, the parliament was closed, freedoms were suspended, students were shot on the streets, censorship reigned, and torture at the hands of the “Department of Social and Political Order” (the political police) became prevalent.⁵⁷

▪

Marighella’s depiction of the dictatorship, and his explanation of why it had to be resisted and overthrown, closely resembled the experience of many revolutionaries fighting against oppression in Third World countries. In all these cases, revolutionaries claimed that they were not the source of violence. Violence, they believed, had been unleashed once “the dictatorship used violence to take control.”⁵⁸

▪

Marighella argued that “violence against violence” was the only solution

“against those who first attacked the people and the nation”. He claimed to be organizing a justified and necessary violent response “in the form of guerrilla warfare”.⁵⁹

-

He reminded his countrymen that the duty of all revolutionaries was to make the revolution.⁶⁰

-

In the tradition of Blanqui, Marighella did not shy away from pronouncing that terrorism, along with violence, was “the only effective weapon against the dictators’ violence”.⁶¹

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In addition to classic ambushes, surprise attacks, and expropriations, Marighella called for revolutionary terrorism, sabotage, and the extermination of “the agents of repression”.⁶²

-

He announced that it was an honour to be called a terrorist, for it meant that the individual was fighting “against the monstrosity” of the dictatorship with a gun in his hand.⁶³

-

Revolutionary terrorism, as a tactic, was a response to the terrorism conducted with impunity by the dictatorship. Its purpose was to demoralize the enemy and “reduce its capacity for repression”.⁶⁴

-

The goal of guerrilla warfare was to forge “a revolutionary army for national liberation”.⁶⁵

-

The most important factor in carrying out a successful guerrilla campaign, according to Marighella, was the necessity of “daring actions” and “fire-power” by “small groups of revolutionaries”.⁶⁶

-

Marighella believed that faced with the superior resources and firepower of the

enemy soldiers and policemen, the “moral superiority” of the urban guerrillas, who were defending the cause of the people, provided them with an “enormous advantage”.⁶⁷

-

Even though Marighella did not categorically rule out “mass struggle and action”, he argued that this form of struggle composed of “occupations, demonstrations, protests and strikes” was a futile exercise without firepower.⁶⁸

-

Even though Marighella claimed that urban armed struggle was tactical, while the decisive and strategic struggle was rural, he reiterated that in Brazil armed guerrilla operations remained “fundamentally urban in nature”.⁶⁹

-

Nevertheless, Marighella argued that once the urban armed struggle was consolidated, “affording the enemy no breathing space”, the arena of struggle would shift to the rural. In the second stage of the struggle, a “decentralized and mobile guerrilla war” would be unleashed in the rural areas pushing “the agrarian revolution through to its conclusion”.⁷⁰

-

The survival of the rural guerrilla movement, he argued, was contingent upon the success of the urban movement, and needed to be an outgrowth of it. According to Marighella, the rural phase of guerrilla warfare required preparation and the construction of peasant support organizations, providing the guerrillas with food, shelter, and information. The success of this final phase of struggle depended on land seizures as well as fanning “the same left-wing terror and the same anxiety for the ruling classes, military and imperialist as was generated in the cities”.⁷¹

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Marighella in Iran via Baghdad

Ahmadzadeh's ideas were formed before he could have come across anything written by Marighella. It is most unlikely that Ahmadzadeh could have had access to Marighella's works. There was only a six-month interval between the publication of Marighella's works in January 1970 and Ahmadzadeh writing his treatise in July 1970. In his pamphlet, Ahmadzadeh referred to the authors that he had studied, and on whose ideas he had drawn upon, such as Clea Silva, but he made no references to Marighella.⁷²

▪

Around January 1968, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh befriended Bijan Hirmanpour, and the latter became Ahmadzadeh's chief supplier of Marxist and revolutionary English language books and publications. The book in which Clea Silva's article had appeared, and to which Ahmadzadeh referred in his pamphlet, was obtained by Hirmanpour. According to Hirmanpour, at that time, he and his circle of friends were neither familiar with Marighella's works, nor interested in his method of struggle.⁷³

▪

In summer of 1970, some five or six members of the "Middle East branch of the National Front Organization" (Jebheh-ye melli-ye kharej az keshvar, bakhsh-e khavar-e miyaneh) left Europe to settle in Baghdad. The goal of these Iranian students studying in Europe was to launch an anti-regime radio station and publication. It was a member of this group who had translated Marighella's important work from English to Farsi.⁷⁴

▪

In September 1970, a short advertisement appeared on the second page of the first issue of their publication, Bakhtar-e Emrooz. It announced the publication of the Manual/Guide for Urban Guerrilla Warfare (Ketab-e rahnama-ye jang-e cheriki-e shahri). The third issue of Bakhtar-e Emrooz printed a short synopsis of this work. Readers were informed of the importance of Marighella's work and the availability of this translation at local bookstores.⁷⁵

▪

To bolster the firepower of the guerrillas that were going to attack the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station, two members were dispatched to secure more arms and ammunition. Sometime around October 1970, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani and Houshang Nayyeri crossed illegally into Iraq to obtain arms.⁷⁶

▪

There, they met with Mahmoud Panahiyan, who provided them with three Browning pistols, two machine guns, ammunition, and explosives. Houshang Nayyeri remembered that in one of their meetings, Panahiyan had given them a pamphlet to study. The title of the pamphlet in Farsi, as he remembered it, was Manual or Guide for Urban Guerrilla Warfare (Jozveh-e rahnama-ye jang cheriki-e shahri). This pamphlet, a Farsi translation of Marighella's Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla published in Baghdad, made its way to Iran when Nayyeri and Saffari-Ashtiyani returned from Iraq.⁷⁷

▪

An incident, some two months after the return of Saffari-Ashtiyani and Houshang Nayyeri, demonstrated that Marighella's pamphlet had found its way to the leadership of the Fada'is in Iran. On 14 December 1970, at the request of SAVAK, Ghafour Hasanpour, a key figure in the history of the Fada'i movement, was arrested. He was accused of communist activities while doing his military service in the Royal Iranian Airforce. When his house was thoroughly searched, among his belongings, SAVAK found a two-page document in Farsi called "Jozveh'i baray-e cherik-e shahri", or "A Pamphlet for the Urban Guerrilla".⁷⁸

▪

By December 1970, the Iranian revolutionaries had access to parts or all of Marighella's Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla.

The first meeting of the urban leadership team of the newly constituted People's Fada'i Guerrillas took place in Tehran on 17 May 1971. The four attendants, Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Hamid Ashraf, and Eskandar Sadeqinejad, discussed both organizing members into specific teams, and a few urban military operations. At this meeting, the organizational blueprint adopted by the Fada'i guerrillas was that of Marighella. According to Ashraf, they closely followed Marighella's recommendation that the urban guerrilla organization should be composed of firing groups. Such groups needed to be isolated and separated from one another, operating on their own initiative and coordinated strategically by a central command.⁷⁹

▪

This leaves no doubt that by May 1971, the Iranian revolutionaries had not only read, but were organizing themselves around Marighella's ideas.

After a series of successful urban operations, somewhere between late May and

mid-August 1971, the Fada'i guerrillas came under continuous attack by the regime. A good number of their members had been arrested, and a few of their safe houses were exposed. While recoiling from the shock of having lost Pouyan, Sadeqinejad, and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, and trying to draw lessons from the substantial losses suffered, Ashraf recalled that the remnants of the teams sat down to study Marighella's text. Having "completely reread and reconsidered Marighella's book", the Group realized that they had committed "all seven deadly sins mentioned in his book". The Group was tangibly learning from its mistakes.⁸⁰

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Around June 1971, Marighella's manual on urban guerrilla warfare had become the beacon and guide of the urban guerrillas.

On 16 July 1972, having already transported handmade grenades from a compromised safe house to a secure location, Hamid Ashraf returned to evacuate the remaining unstable explosives. While he was riding his turquoise Honda 90, carrying explosives in its packsaddle, the motorbike blew up. Ashraf was seriously injured but managed to get away from the scene of the explosion. When the security services arrived on the scene, they found a copy of Marighella's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, published by the bi-monthly *Tricontinental*.⁸¹

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Notes

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Iran-e Azad, shomareh 4, 20 Janvier [1963], shomareh 7, Farvardin-e 1342, shomareh 8, Ordibehesht 1342, shomareh 9, Khordad 1342, shomareh 10, Tir 1342 (June 1963), shomareh 12, Mordad 1342 (August 1963).

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Bijan Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998, Paris.

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Mehdi Same‘, personal interview, 22 August 2015, Paris.

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Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, personal interview 5–8 January 2016, Cologne.

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Ferdowsi, Shahrivar 1346.

[6](#)

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Bonachea and Valdés, p. 180; Ferdowsi, Shahrivar 1346, p. 19.

[7](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, vol. 1, pp. 210, 262–263.

[8](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 246. Meftahi's interrogation reports.

[9](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 231.

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 254.

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Qasem Rashidi through Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, personal communication, 30 May 2016.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, p. 13.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, p. 122.

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Ettela'at, 14 Farvardin 1346, 6 Mehr 1346, 18 Tir 1347, 31 Shahrivar 1347, 2 Mehr 1347.

[20](#)

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Ferdowsi, 22 Mehr 1347, 2 Tir 1348.

[21](#)

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Ettela'at, 25 Azar 1347, 15 Shahrivar 1348, 18 Shahrivar 1348.

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Fasnameh-ye motale 'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 232.

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Mao Tse-tung, “Communism and Dictatorship”, November 1920 and January 1921, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_06.htm

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(retrieved 10 September 2018).

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Mao Tse-tung, On Contradiction, August 1937, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm

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(retrieved 12 September 2018).

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Mao Tse-tung, On Guerrilla Warfare, 1937, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch01.htm>

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Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 1937.

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https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_10.htm

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Mao Tse-tung, “Problems of War and Strategy”, 6 November 1938,

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(retrieved 20 September 2018).

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Mao Tse-tung, “Problems of War and Strategy”, 6 November 1938.

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Bonachea and Valdés, p. 364.

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Bonachea and Valdés, pp. 179–180.

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Bonachea and Valdés, pp. 77–78.

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Bonachea and Valdés, pp. 80–81.

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Bonachea and Valdés, p. 84.

[36](#)

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Bonachea and Valdés, p. 85.

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C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, p. 7; Bonachea and Valdés, p. 90.

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C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, pp. 7–8.

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C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 8.

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[46](#)

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Bonachea and Valdés, p. 94.

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C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 38.

[48](#)

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[49](#)

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C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 129.

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C. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, pp. 115–116.

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1971, p. 117.

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C. Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971. The title given to this work in the Penguin version was: *Handbook of Urban Guerrilla Warfare*. To my knowledge, the only work by Marighella which appeared in English before his death was “A Message to Brazilians”, *Monthly Review*, vol. 21, October 1969. This was a month before his death.

[56](#)

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, pp. 19–20, 106.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, pp. 60–61.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, pp. 48, 55, 67.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, p. 62.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, p. 112.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, pp. 37, 41, 45, 50.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, pp. 31, 35, 39.

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, p. 64.

[68](#)

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, pp. 35, 39, 55–56.

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Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil*, pp. 47, 110, 128.

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Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil*, pp. 44, 99.

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Marighela, *For the Liberation of Brazil*, pp. 99–100.

[72](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 90.

[73](#)

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Hirmanpour, telephone conversation, courtesy of Mastoureh Ahmadzadeh, Paris, 10 July 2018.

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H. Ashraf, *Jam'bandi-e seh saleh*, Tehran: Entesharat-e negah, 1357, p. 23.

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Ashraf, Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, p. 89.

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 450.

Formative Years of the Jazani Group

The ten-year sociopolitical history of Iran, from the coup against Mosaddeq to quelling the pro-Khomeyni uprising in June 1963, provides the proper context for understanding political developments in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The domestic influential factors radicalizing Iranian intellectuals could be readily explained by what happened and did not happen during the 1953–1963 decade.

Jazani the entrepreneur

Before dealing with Bijan Jazani's political career, a unique aspect of his life needs to be visited. Jazani's entrepreneurial skills and financial success set him distinctly apart from the other theoreticians of armed struggle in Iran. For at least ten years, Jazani was both a radical political activist and a successful businessperson. In 1956, a few years before entering Tehran University, the nineteen-year-old Bijan Jazani had founded a commercial company called "Persepolis". Harun (Parviz) Yashaya'i, an old high school friend of Jazani, was his partner in this endeavour. In high school, the two young men had attended student circles associated with the Tudeh Party. Relying on Jazani's talent for

drawing and graphics, the two entrepreneurs ventured into producing commercial posters for movies that were about to be released. They subsequently expanded their business to making commercial teasers and advertisements, which were projected in movie theatres.

Their advertisements, such as those for chewing gums (khorous-neshan), heaters (arj), tea (golestan), cooking-oil (shahpasand), and banking services (bank-e melli), became very popular at a time when moviegoers were on the rise in Iran. Manouchehr Kalantari, Jazani's uncle and one of the pillars of the original Jazani Group, was active in the company right from the beginning. By 1961, Jazani and Yashaya'i were said to be the sole producers of commercial teasers in Iran. Their pioneering start-up became financially successful and, in 1963, the company changed its name to Tabli Film. The one-room initiative located at Koucheh Berlin eventually moved into a ten-floor black-stone building on Hedayat Street. According to Yashaya'i, after a few years of hard work, the two had become well off (dasteman be dahaneman beresad).¹

-

From 1960 until his arrest in January 1968, Jazani was the co-Chief Executive Officer of a flourishing commercial enterprise. According to his business partner, Jazani was perfectly capable of compartmentalizing and dividing the two aspects of his life, his business affairs, and his political pursuits. Jazani's political associates, such as Sa'id (Mash'ouf) Kalantari, another one of his uncles, Mohammad Choupanzadeh, and Majid Ahsan, would frequent his business offices.²

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The headquarters of "Persepolis", and later "Tabli Film", served as a meeting hub for Jazani's political friends. Based on Jazani's varied activities, one can only marvel at how well he could multi-function.

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Whence it came

The formation of the Jazani Group, as a semi-clandestine and later clandestine body mulling over the preparation of armed struggle against the regime, can be divided into two major phases. Before the outset of the first phase, Jazani had been associated with a loose network of high school students, as well as a well-structured university organization. Jazani's activities and connections with student networks, in this forerunning period, helped him recruit members during the second phase of his activities. This early period of Jazani's political pursuits cannot be properly considered as an integral part of the history of the Jazani Group. Jazani's student activities were ad hoc, legal, and public, while the Jazani Group was committed to the preparation of violent methods of struggle.

In a work entitled "Draft of the Sociology and Strategical Foundations of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement" (Tarh-e jame'h shenasi va mabani-e estrateji-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e Iran), Jazani dedicated a few pages to his group. He called it the "Group of 14", referring to the number of defendants facing trial after the Group's dismantlement on 30 December 1968. Jazani maintained that the initial network (shabakeh avaliyeh) of the "Group of 14" was founded as "a clandestine political group" during the years prior to 1960.³

▪

Even though there is clear evidence of Jazani's involvement with student activities and networks in 1960, the existence of a clandestine political group, which would have been led by him, cannot be verified. Ignoring the differences in objectives and activities, Jazani chose to fuse his student and non-student activities, thereby stretching the history of the "Jazani Group". Jazani's backdating of the Group's official date of birth to the pre-1960 period is contradicted by the official historiography of the Fada'i guerrillas and Jazani's own interrogation reports.⁴

▪

In one of his interrogation reports, Jazani referred to the spring of 1963 (avayel-e sal-e 1342) as the birthdate of his Group.⁵

▪

Later, in one of his prison writings, he mentioned that this "clandestine political group" was born before 1960. However, it was "re-organized" around January to 20 March 1963 (payan-e sal-e 1341). This reorganization, according to Jazani,

aimed at “preparing practically for violent methods of struggle”.⁶

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It will, however, be argued that the “Jazani Group” was most probably constituted after the 5 June uprising, sometime between September 1963 and January 1964. The initial purpose of the Group at that point was to discuss violent methods of struggle, among other topics.⁷

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Serious preparation for armed struggle occurred around March 1966 and only in the second phase of the Jazani Group’s activities.

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Student political activities

To trace the student activities of Jazani, and his multilayered acquaintances and connections, one could go back to January 1960. On 10 January 1960, high school students with National Front sympathies launched a three-day demonstration which rocked the capital. The scale of the demonstrations, the slogans chanted, and the graffiti on the walls were such that Prime Minister Eqbal ordered General Derakhshani, the deputy Chief of Police, to intervene and disperse the students. Three days later, in an unusual occurrence, Eqbal was forced to explain the events to concerned Iranian parliamentarians.⁸

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One of the engines behind the strikes of 10 January 1960 was a loose gathering of politicized high school students with National Front sympathies. Their centre of activity was at Darolfonoun, with sympathizers at Adib and Marvi high schools. Some of these student activists later became directly involved in the Iranian guerrilla movement. The student leaders at Darolfonoun, including Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, ‘Aziz Sarmadi, Qasem Rashidi, and Reza Ansari, were in contact with Bijan Jazani, who had entered the Faculty of Literature at Tehran

University during the academic year 1959–1960.⁹

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Sa‘id (Mash‘ouf) Kalantari and ‘Ali-Akbar Safa‘i-Farahani are said to have also participated in these three-day demonstrations.¹⁰

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Gradually, these high school militants joined Jazani in an intra-university organization, the Progressive University Students of the National Front. Other members of this group included Majid Ahsan, Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, Iraj Vahedipour, Manouchehr Kalantari, and ‘Ali-Akbar Akbari.¹¹

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Jazani’s active involvement with high school students in 1960 does not establish proof that those same gatherings morphed into the “Jazani Group”. Jazani was in contact with different clusters and circles in the early 1960s. In time, these clusters broke up given their ad hoc nature. Some members parted ways completely and some regrouped around Jazani in different clusters and with new members. Arguing that the initial “Jazani Group” was composed of members who were involved in university student politics of the 1960s would be correct. However, to claim a systematic and organizational connection between the Jazani Group and Jazani’s pre-1960s political acquaintances, referred to as a “clandestine political group”, would be a half-truth.

The ebb and flow of student activities reflected the cycles of relative political liberalization and repression in Iran. Since 1959, the Shah had toyed with the idea of allowing greater political liberties and tolerating some degree of opposition. Sensing the change in the political environment, on 27 June 1960, Allahyar Saleh wrote an open letter. The National Front’s highly respected politician encouraged the people to participate in the twentieth parliamentary elections. On the heels of Saleh’s letter, the Second National Front announced the resumption of its activities on 21 July 1960.¹²

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During the academic years 1959–1960 and 1960–1961, the students at Tehran University became organized and formed different factions under the umbrella of the National Front. The honeymoon between the left faction of the Student Organization of the National Front and the cautious, old guard leadership of the Second National Front proved to be short-lived. Cleavages between the two

became accentuated during the events surrounding the 1st Congress of the National Front (25 December 1962 – 1 January 1963).

Right before the Congress, Shapour Bakhtiyar unilaterally suspended seven left students from the National Front.¹³

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Hasan Zia-Zarifi, Bijan Jazani, ‘Ali-Akbar Akbari, Esma‘il Ahmadpour, and Manouchehr Kalantari were five of the seven students barred from participating in the National Front Congress on the charge of having communist tendencies.¹⁴

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Bakhtiyar’s purge generated widespread discontent among the university students, who saw his decision as unfair and undemocratic.¹⁵

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The arrest of the National Front’s leadership starting on 22 January 1963, and their gradual release some seven months later, made most of them rather timid in their anti-despotic pursuits. The 5 June uprising occurred while the leadership of the National Front was still in prison. From September 1963, in the face of the regime’s repression, the unnerved National Front leadership had become paralysed. The Student Organization, and especially its left faction, were disheartened and outraged with the leadership’s growing political conservatism.

On 7 September 1963, intimidated by the regime, the newly released leadership of the National Front cancelled an important political demonstration, although the Student Organization of the National Front had invested much time and effort preparing and publicizing this event. They had even obtained the approval of the leadership while they were in prison. The sudden cancellation of this demonstration came as a great disappointment. According to Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, it was from this date that the radical faction of the Student Organization of the National Front decided not to follow the directives of the leadership and claimed its autonomy (*khod mokhtari*). The leading student figures who came to this decision were Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, ‘Ali-Akbar Akbari, Bijan Jazani, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, Hasan Habibi, and ‘Abbas Naraqi.¹⁶

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September 1963 marked the effective split between the radical students and the

National Front's leadership.

Four months later, on 28 January 1964, Allahyar Saleh, the President of the Executive Council of the National Front, announced a "policy of patience and waiting". His justification for the cessation of political activities was that "the ruling clique had become very powerful and the National Front had become very weak."¹⁷

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The radicalized students considered this as the death of the Second National Front, and campaigned to secure the help of Mosaddeq, and form an invigorated Third National Front.

From the end of March to the beginning of May 1964, there was a three-way flurry of letters between the Iranian students at home and abroad, Mosaddeq in Ahmadabad, and the leadership of the Second National Front. The intense correspondence resulted in the resignation of the Executive Council of the National Front. The Third National Front, formed on 29 July 1965, was very short-lived as members of its various parties and organizations quickly found themselves behind bars. Jazani observed that the disintegration of the Third National Front, and the imprisonment of its members, forcefully imposed a policy of patience and waiting on the legal opposition.¹⁸

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After the 5 June 1963 repression, Jazani continued to believe that a radical front of the left could publicly and openly engage in an anti-Shah movement.¹⁹

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Until September 1963, and perhaps January 1964, Jazani was deeply involved in the student politics of the rebellious students of the National Front. He was invested in salvaging a legal, but radical, anti-regime organization.

In the aftermath of the great disappointment in September 1963, when the leadership of the National front prevented students from holding their rally, Jazani suggested writing a critical commentary on the state of the National Front. Jazani's proposal was adopted by a group of five, including Iraj Vahedipour, Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, Bijan Jazani, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, and Manouchehr Kalantari. A fifteen-page manifesto called "Past Experiences as the Guide to the Future", primarily written by Jazani, was the outcome of this

effort.²⁰

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Even in the aftermath of September 1963, Jazani did not seem to have completely given up on open National Front politics.

Even after Saleh announced the disengaging policy of “patience and waiting” in January 1964, Jazani and his left friends remained intent on continuing their open and legal methods of opposing the Shah. Their political demands revolved around preventing the Shah from intervening in the affairs of the state, promoting the independence of the Iranian parliament, and upholding the rule of law.²¹

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Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr remembered that after September 1963, even though Hasan Zia-Zarifi and Majid Ahsan were still hanging around the old left student gatherings, Jazani gradually began to disappear. Keshavarz-Sadr believed that the discussions on the formation of the Jazani Group must have begun between September 1963 and the announcement of the policy of “patience and waiting” in January 1964.²²

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Based on circumstantial evidence, the Jazani Group’s birthday was most probably between September 1963 and January 1964.

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First phase of the Jazani Group

Phase one of the Jazani Group began sometime between September 1963 and January 1964 and lasted until Jazani’s arrest on 22 May 1965. Jazani received a nine-month prison sentence for his activities in the clandestine and unofficial organ of the Third National Front, The Message of University Students (Payam-

e Daneshjou).²³

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Phase two of this group's activities began after Jazani's release from prison, in late February 1966, and lasted until his next arrest, in January 1968. The historical evidence explaining the evolution and development of phase one is rather scant, and relies mainly on interrogation reports, creating a picture that is hazy, circumstantial, and conjectural. Phase two of the Jazani Group can be constructed with greater precision, as information on certain aspects of this period can be based on the memory of a few surviving first-hand actors.

According to Jazani, Manouchehr Kalantari, his uncle, called for a first meeting at the house of Kalantari's father, where Heshmatollah Shahrzad was also present.²⁴

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This first meeting marks the opening phase of the Jazani Group's activities. Based on the assumption that this meeting took place somewhere between September 1963 and January 1964, Jazani was around twenty-six, Kalantari was about twenty-eight, and Shahrzad, a pharmacologist, was around thirty-two. All three were founders of the Jazani Group. They all had Tudeh Party affiliations, were involved in university politics, and served prison sentences for their political activities.

During their first meeting, the three spent a considerable amount of time talking about tangential matters before entering serious discussions. Their discussions revolved around the possibility of pursuing clandestine communist activities. They also discussed the possible methods and objectives of their activities. Throughout 1963 and 1964, the three founders continued to meet outside Tehran at intervals of a month or more. They agreed to continue their association and recruit others independently. At some point, Manouchehr Kalantari introduced Kiyoumars Izadi to the group. Izadi was about twenty-eight years old and had met Kalantari in prison. In 1954, Izadi had been arrested for his membership in the Tudeh Party.²⁵

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The Group engaged in various discussions, including the use of force, assassination, and the Sino-Soviet ideological debates. At some unknown date, the Group drew up an organizational chart. Jazani was made responsible for

recruitment and propaganda. Shahrzad took charge of organizational and educational activities. Kalantari and Izadi handled combat preparation, regional surveys, and reconnaissance missions.²⁶

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During the first phase of the Jazani Group, meetings were irregular, and members aired their raw thoughts freely. According to Jazani, the other three members of the Group believed that it would take a small and quick operation to take over political power. Jazani did not share this opinion. There must have been some talk about the Sino-Soviet dispute at the time, as Jazani accused Manouchehr Kalantari of being pro-Chinese. Jazani also remembered being criticized, supposedly for his pro-Soviet position. According to Jazani, all four members were critical of the Tudeh Party and its Central Committee.²⁷

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Even though there is mention of an organizational chart, there is no reference to its implementation. During this phase, no concrete actions were taken to indicate the specific direction of the Group. The Group was still in its incubation, deliberation, and orientation stage when Jazani was arrested on 22 May 1965.

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Jazani and the message of university students

Around December 1963, while Jazani attended the sporadic meetings of his group of four, his mind and energy were invested in a different project. At this time, Jazani was fully committed to publishing *The Message of University Students* (Payam-e Daneshjou). This clandestine monthly reflected the ideas of the insubordinate National Front university students who had parted ways with the leadership. The rebellious National Front students who believed in continuing the anti-despotic struggle found an ideal platform in this university publication.

The editorial board of this monthly, Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari (editor from around December 1963), Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, Majid Ahsan, and Mansour Soroush, were all friends of Jazani. They also belonged to the left wing of the National Front's Student Organization. Jazani was responsible for the publication of the monthly, and Behzad Nabavi at Tehran's Polytechnic University was responsible for its distribution.²⁸

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Jazani attended the regular editorial board meetings and managed the production of some four thousand copies of the monthly. The length of each issue varied between nine and twelve pages. To help with this artisanal clandestine production, Jazani enlisted the participation of Majid Ahsan, who was on the editorial board, and Farrokh Negahdar. Jazani made extensive use of the facilities, machines, and tools of his own private business to help publish the monthly.²⁹

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Consumed with the practical concerns of printing the monthly, Jazani did not contribute to its content. The main message of this publication was three-fold. It maintained that "if the ashes of patience and waiting were brushed off the burning fire, it would burn the existential kernel of the corrupt ruling clique." It continued to promote the "establishment of a legal state" (hokumat-e qanouni) and condemned despotism, colonialism, and liberticide (azadi-koshi). The publication condemned the "mass killings" during the 5 June 1963 uprising. In the same breath, it criticized the "weak and unprincipled leadership of the National Front" for failing to condemn the repression.³⁰

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The time and energy required to produce this clandestine publication along with attending to his business were not negligible. It would be reasonable to assume that between December 1963 and his arrest in May 1965, Jazani did not have all that much time left for his group of four.

Having served a nine-month prison sentence for his involvement with The Message of University Students, Jazani was freed around the end of February 1966. After his release, possibly around the Iranian New Year (21 March 1966), Jazani approached Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari to discuss the relaunching of the monthly, which had ceased publication while he was in prison. The two friends concluded that it was impossible to resume the publication and distribution of

the monthly. The mounting sensitivity of the regime to the opposition and the severity of its retributions presented insurmountable obstacles.³¹

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Second phase of the Jazani Group

The second phase of the Jazani Group's activities began around March 1966. At this time, Jazani decided that political conditions were not conducive for public and legal operations. Therefore, he opted for semi-clandestine and clandestine political activities, the exact nature of which remained to be determined. Around the end of March 1966, Jazani met with Manouchehr Kalantari and Heshmatollah Shahrzad, and was informed that Kiyoumars Izadi had left the Group. After a few meetings, and possibly around April/May 1966 (ava'el-e sale 1345), Manouchehr Kalantari notified his friends that he had been in contact with Hasan Zia-Zarifi, who would be joining the Group.

Zia-Zarifi was about twenty-seven years old at the time. He too had been affiliated with the Tudeh Party in his youth. Somewhere between 1960 and 1963, Zia-Zarifi, while retaining his Marxist penchant, had become a staunch supporter of the National Front. Zia-Zarifi, like Jazani, was a well-known and respected figure among student activists of the early 1960s. He too had been imprisoned for his political activities. Zia-Zarifi already knew Jazani, Manouchehr Kalantari, Sa'id Kalantari, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, and Heshmatollah Shahrzad.³²

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Around May 1966, Sa'id Kalantari, Manouchehr's brother and another uncle of Jazani's, also joined the Group, as did 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani, a friend of Sa'id Kalantari, and 'Aziz Sarmadi, a friend of Jazani.³³

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Between April/May 1966, when Manouchehr Kalantari announced that Zia-Zarifi would join the Group, and 4 April 1967, when Manouchehr Kalantari left

Iran for London, the Group underwent serious transformations.³⁴

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During this one-year interval, the Jazani Group was in search of an ideal organizational system while expanding. The Group hoped to adopt an efficient structure, clearly attribute tasks to its growing members, and impose some degree of discipline on them. Even though the Group made ad hoc plans to engage in an armed operation, it failed to carry them through.

Once Zia-Zarifi joined the Group, around May/June 1966, he informed Jazani and Manouchehr Kalantari that he was in contact with ‘Abbas Sourki, whom he had known from their years of student activity as well as their time in jail. Jazani, Zia-Zarifi, and Manouchehr Kalantari had concluded that their numbers were insufficient for launching any meaningful operations, and therefore they needed to combine forces with Sourki’s group. Sourki seemed to have given the Jazani Group an exaggerated account of the forces and capabilities he commanded. According to one account, Sourki had spoken of some 120 members in his group, and of possessing considerable amounts of weapons and ammunition. Around August/September 1966 (nimeh-e sal-e 1345), members of the Jazani Group met with members of the Sourki Group, and after some adjustments, decided to work together.³⁵

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Sourki was a Mosaddeqist as well as a member of the Tudeh Party. In 1958, he had created a group called the Combatants of the Tudeh Party (Razmavaran-e hezb-e tudeh). Sourki was subsequently arrested on 15 February 1961, spent thirteen months in prison, and was released in March 1962. He reactivated his group around the end of January 1965. This group, composed of some five members, had begun studying literature on guerrilla warfare in Cuba and had also discussed guerrilla warfare in Iran.³⁶

▪

Zia-Zarifi had been in regular contact with Sourki since early 1966, and the two had already discussed the possibility of armed struggle. Around August/September 1966, Zerar Zahedian and Naser Aqayan, members of Sourki’s circle, joined Jazani’s Group. The problem, however, was that unbeknownst to them, Naser Aqayan had become a SAVAK informant, reporting on the activities of Sourki’s group. Once the two groups merged, SAVAK had a mole inside the Jazani Group. At some point in meetings between Zahedian,

Sourki, Zia-Zarifi, Shahrzad, Manouchehr Kalantari, and Jazani, they all agreed that armed struggle was required to change the political status quo. This became the Group's ultimate, yet not immediate objective.

Even after combining forces, the Group realized that it was not yet in any position to launch a revolution. They set their target on "preparing the conditions (zamineh) for the revolution". The members of the Group believed that creating an organization capable of spearheading the preparatory phase of the revolution would achieve their objective.³⁷

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Initially, the Group created two distinct branches. The political and propaganda branch was supposed to be isolated from the operational and military branch. Members were expected to go about their ordinary lives and jobs, while seriously committing themselves to their organizational responsibilities.

The political and propaganda branch was composed of Jazani, Zia-Zarifi, and Sourki, while the operational and military branch enlisted Shahrzad and Zahedian. Manouchehr Kalantari, the intermediary between the two branches, was a member of both. The political and propaganda branch was mainly responsible for recruitment and public relations. The remit of the operational and military branch was more complicated. It was responsible for financing the purchase of arms, probably planning bank robberies, and identifying territorially and socially suitable regions for guerrilla warfare.³⁸

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Both branches evolved and underwent changes in time. Neither Shahrzad nor Zahedian had any known prior experience in military matters. This initial division of labour evolved and underwent changes from around August/September 1966 to around January–March 1967.

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The political and propaganda branch

Little is known about the activities of the operational and military branch during this time. However, under Jazani's auspices, the political branch made important strides. Around August 1966, a period which coincides with the merger of the Sourki and Jazani groups and their initial division of labour, Jazani constituted a political and intellectual circle. This circle of three was composed of Qasem Rashidi, Majid Ahsan, and Farrokh Negahdar. However, oddly enough it was under the command of Shahrzad, a member of the military branch.

According to Jazani, each of the three members of this circle was chosen for his particular attributes. Negahdar was an energetic student activist with a wide network of connections. Ahsan was a well-known and respected figure in the student movement and familiar with National Front figures and politics. Finally, Rashidi, an activist in student politics since 1959, was well read and had a firm grasp of Marxist theoretical tenets. Whereas Ahsan and Negahdar were affiliated with Tehran University, Rashidi was a graduate of Tehran's Polytechnic University.

Jazani met separately with his friends Majid Ahsan and Qasem Rashidi, whom he'd known since his days as a student activist. The purpose of these meetings was to invite them to join a political circle. Rashidi had known Jazani since 1959 and accepted his invitation, joining the circle under the alias of Qasemi. The mandate of this secret circle was to work among radical university students, and the left activists of the National Front, to mobilize and organize them. Those contacted and recruited were to be given theoretical instructions and oriented towards Marxism.³⁹

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During his meeting with Ahsan, Jazani spoke to him about the absence of legal venues, and the need to pursue the struggle through clandestine means. Jazani discussed the creation of a clandestine organization, where the rules of anonymity would prevail. Jazani defined the purpose of the organization as political, and the topic of military or guerrilla operations did not come up. Ahsan joined the circle under the alias Nikoukar.⁴⁰

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The third member, Negahdar (alias Hafez), had been in contact with Jazani through 'Aziz Sarmadi since 1963. Under instructions from Jazani, Negahdar

met with Shahrzad in the summer of 1966, and became a member.⁴¹

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According to the participants in this circle, their gatherings, deliberations, and discussions were secret. In their regular meetings every other week at Ahsan's house, the members discussed world current events, such as US foreign policy in Vietnam, the six-day Arab–Israeli war, and the Sino-Soviet conflict. Members also exchanged information on the debates and discussions within the National Front. Two members of this circle distinctly remembered that issues such as armed struggle and guerrilla warfare were never broached. Farrokh Negahdar, however, remembered that the topic of armed struggle in Iran was discussed in their meetings.⁴²

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The participants considered themselves as communists. They understood communism as an ideology which “believed deeply in the interests of the toilers” and was based on “equality, fraternity and liberty”.⁴³

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The Marxist and communist theoretical knowledge of the group was “very weak” and was mainly “centred around the thoughts of Lenin, Stalin and Mao”. According to Qasem Rashidi, the group's view of Iranian society lacked “class consciousness”, and it was wanting of an economic, political, and class analysis of the country.⁴⁴

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After about a year, Shahrzad's political circle of four underwent transformations. It is unclear why Jazani had put Shahrzad in charge of the political branch when he had been in the military branch of the Group. Around August 1967, Shahrzad was relieved of his position, and Zia-Zarifi took over his responsibilities.⁴⁵

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According to Negahdar, Shahrzad was not suited to leading the circle as he seemed more concerned with running his pharmacy than fulfilling his political responsibilities. With the arrival of Zia-Zarifi, the circle was revitalized, able to play a much more active role in the universities and channelling their discontent.⁴⁶

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Around the end of October 1967, Qasem Rashidi took a job at the Esfahan Steel Mill and left the Group. The shrunken political circle, under the leadership of Zia-Zarifi, carried out its tasks for about eight months and ceased operation after the arrest of Jazani in January 1968.⁴⁷

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The operational and military branch

Somewhere between December 1966 and March 1967 (payan-e sal-e 1345), before Manouchehr Kalantari's departure from Iran, Jazani noticed that progress in the operational and military branch was slow and erratic. Around September 1966, the military branch had been divided into an urban and a mountain/jungle team. Shahrzad, who oversaw the political circle composed of Ahsan, Qasemi, and Negahdar, was also put in command of the mountain/jungle team. Manouchehr Kalantari, who was the intermediary between the political and military branch, took charge of the urban team.

Somewhere around December 1966, Kalantari reported a sense of "despair" and "confusion" in his branch. The urban team was supposed to rob a bank by 20 March 1967. However, both Shahrzad and Manouchehr Kalantari, the leaders of the military branch, were having doubts about the usefulness and practicality of armed struggle. Disagreements within the two teams of the military branch added to problems and delayed the implementation of objectives. Time was passing by and plans remained unfulfilled. The leadership committee, composed of Jazani, Manouchehr Kalantari, Shahrzad, Zia-Zarifi, Sourki, and Zahediyan, therefore, decided on a major reshuffling of the Group.⁴⁸

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The mountain/jungle group was under construction from around September 1966.⁴⁹

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Its remit was to prepare for armed struggle. Sa' id Kalantari and ' Ali-Akbar Safa' i-Farahani, who were placed under the supervision of Shahrzad, were probably its first two members.⁵⁰

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Kalantari and Safa' i-Farahani were old high school friends and fellow mountain climbers. The primary objective of the new overhaul was to revive and reinvigorate both teams of the military branch. It must have been in around January/February of 1967 that Jazani took over Shahrzad's position as leader of the mountain team, while Sourki was put in charge of the urban team, replacing Manouchehr Kalantari.⁵¹

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Even though Jazani took responsibility for the mountain team, the actual operational leader of the team was his uncle Sa' id Kalantari.

To prepare for armed struggle, Sourki was charged with four main tasks: training four members of the group for armed operations, taking the trainees on mountain and forest expeditions to assure their physical fitness, engaging in lightning attacks, presumably against banks to procure necessary funds, and finally obtaining weapons. The four members of the urban team under Sourki's leadership were ' Aziz Sarmadi, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Mohammad Choupanzadeh.

By the time Sourki took over from Manouchehr Kalantari, the urban team had spent some time planning a bank robbery. Their efforts, probably around October and December 1966, did not yield any results.⁵²

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At the time, Sarmadi and Jalil-Afshar were about twenty-three years-old, Choupanzadeh was around thirty, and Saffari-Ashtiyani was about thirty-two years-old. All four, except for Saffari-Ashtiyani, were directly affiliated with Jazani.

Choupanzadeh's friendship with Jazani and his family dated back to 1952. Choupanzadeh was a mason and a member of the Tudeh Party's Youth Organization. Even though he had only a primary school education, he was well versed in Iranian poetry.⁵³

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Jalil-Afshar's friendship with Jazani went back to around 1951, when they became neighbours in Jaleh Street, in the Chaharsad Dastgah district.⁵⁴

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Sarmadi was a close friend and classmate of Bahman Qoreyshi, Jazani's future brother-in-law. The friendship and political collaboration between Jazani and Sarmadi began around 1959.⁵⁵

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Sarmadi and Jalil-Afshar had also been in contact with Jazani since their high school political activism in 1960. Sarmadi and Saffari-Ashtiyani had been in prison together in 1962. Relations between Sarmadi and Saffari-Ashtiyani continued after their release from prison, and later the two formed a small circle with Jalil-Afshar. This circle was also attended by Manouchehr Kalantari.⁵⁶

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Saffari-Ashtiyani was introduced to Jazani and his group by Sa'id Kalantari. Soudabeh Jazani, Bijan's younger sister, recalled that Saffari-Ashtiyani and Safa'i-Farahani were both in Sa'id Kalantari's circle of friends (mahfel).⁵⁷

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Choupanzadeh's membership in the urban team did not last long. Around January 1967, Sourki, the new head of the urban team, requested Choupanzadeh's transfer to Jazani's mountain team. The mountain team grew to six members: Jazani, Choupanzadeh, Sa'id Kalantari, 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, and Hamid Ashraf.⁵⁸

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Mohammad-Majid Kianzad knew Jazani from the academic year 1962–1963, but had no direct political affiliation with him at the time. Around April/May (ordibehesht) 1965, Kianzad was arrested in relation to Parviz Nikkhah's group. Three weeks later Bijan Jazani was arrested in relation to his activities with the publications of The Message of University Students (Payam-e Daneshjou). Around June/July 1965, Kianzad and Jazani spent about two months together at Qezelqal'eh prison where they became close. Jazani was released from prison in February 1966 and approached Kianzad around April/May 1966 (ordibehesht 1355).

The two would meet in Jazani's car, a yellowish and orange DKW (later Audi).

After their second meeting, Jazani assigned Kianzad to the mountain/jungle group. It was around July/August 1966 that Kianzad met Shahrzad, the leader of the group. Kianzad found Shahrzad discomposed and anxious. After he spoke to Jazani about his concerns, Kianzad was put in contact with Sa' id Kalantari around September 1966. Hamid Ashraf joined the mountain team around April/May 1967.⁵⁹

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Four of the six members of the mountain/jungle group were long-standing, almost professional mountain climbers. Sa' id Kalantari and Safa' i-Farahani were two of the six original founders of the Kaveh Mountain-Climbing and Skiing Group established in 1958. Between 1963 and 1964, Safa' i-Farahani, and in particular Kalantari, were participating regularly in daring mountain, rock, and ice climbing expeditions.⁶⁰

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Choupanzadeh is also said to have been a member of the Kaveh mountain climbing group. In the academic year 1960–1961, Kianzad had befriended Eskandar Sadeqinejad during mountain climbing programmes organized by the Tehran Mountaineering Association. In 1961–1962, Kianzad met Safa' i-Farahani during a mountaineering expedition.⁶¹

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Ashraf, who had begun mountain climbing around 1962, accompanied the Kaveh mountain climbing group on 30 December 1963 as an independent mountain climber. At the time, Ashraf had just turned seventeen. Sa' id Kalantari, Fereydoun Kalantari (Sa' id's brother and yet another uncle of Jazani), and Ashraf's high school friend Farrokh Negahdar were among the members of the Kaveh group on this expedition.⁶²

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It is said that Ashraf also went mountain climbing with Sa' id Kalantari and Safa' i-Farahani.

From around September/October 1966, as members of the Jazani Group mountain/jungle team, Sa' id Kalantari and Kianzad began a series of reconnaissance missions around the mountain regions of the North, suitable for guerrilla activities. Around March 1967, Choupanzadeh accompanied them on these mountain climbing expeditions. Ashraf began participating in the

reconnaissance and mountain climbing expeditions of the mountain/jungle team as soon as he joined the team.⁶³

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The military operation that should have happened but did not

In 1967, a joint committee of the urban and mountain teams composed of Jazani, Sourki, and Sarmadi was established to coordinate efforts and activities for the smooth and rapid implementation of plans.⁶⁴

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Once again, intentions and projects turned out to be much more complicated in practice than they seemed in theory. Even after reorganization, the urban team seemed to be procrastinating while miscellaneous events hampered its efforts. Around August 1967, Sarmadi was imprisoned for a month for non-political reasons.

The Group planned an attack to rob the Cooperative and Distribution Bank (Bank-e ta'avoni va towzi') after Sarmadi's release from prison, probably around November 1967. A specific date had not been set for carrying out this first military operation.⁶⁵

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By November 1967, Shahrzad had already left the Group, and the leadership committee was now down to four members: Jazani, Sourki, Zia-Zarifi, and Zahedian.⁶⁶

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Before Manouchehr Kalantari's departure for England, he and his urban team had spent some time planning to rob the cash transport truck of the Saderat Bank. With Kalantari's departure, the plan to rob a bank and finance future projects of the Group was passed on to Sourki and his urban team. Sourki's team

concluded that Kalantari's plan was not practical, and instead identified the Cooperative and Distribution Bank as the perfect site for the operation. It is not clear whether Sourki knew that the bank they planned to expropriate (rob) belonged to Asadollah Rashidiyan, one of the principal architects and perpetrators of the CIA coup against Mosaddeq.

The Group's new target was a branch of the Cooperative and Distribution Bank located near Tehran's slaughterhouse in the southern neighbourhood of Naziabad. This was where all proceeds from the sale of Tehran's daily meat supply were deposited. The bank was open at nights until 22:00, and was in a rather remote area, hardly frequented by ordinary customers. The combination of these factors made it an ideal target. At a meeting of the joint committee, Jazani, Sourki, and Sarmadi studied the project and agreed on the broad contours of the operation.

The operation was to be carried out by members of both the urban and mountain/jungle team. Sourki's urban team, composed of Sarmadi, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Jalil-Afshar, was to execute the operation. Jazani's mountain team, composed of Sa'id Kalantari, Safa'i-Farahani, and Choupanzadeh, was to act as backup team. They were to be present at the location, but go into action only if their intervention was required. The plan was to cut off the bank's telephone lines, neutralize its six employees, tie their hands behind their backs, gag them, and rob the bank with no bloodshed. Arms were to be used only to intimidate the employees. Before the operation, Jazani's team had been responsible for monitoring the bank at nights, while Sourki's team was charged with surveying it during the day. Members of both teams were led to believe they were alone in the attack. Only Jazani and Sourki knew the full scope.⁶⁷

▪

In preparation for bank robberies, Manouchehr Kalantari had obtained two pistols. With the help of Kiyoumars Izadi he had hidden them in the mountains of Pasqal'eh and Shahabad. Once Manouchehr Kalantari had left for England, Izadi was the only person who knew the whereabouts of the weapons. When the Group decided to recover the weapons, sometime in December 1967, Izadi assisted Sa'id Kalantari to recover the corroded and defective pistols.⁶⁸

▪

At this time Izadi was no longer a member of the Group. Zia-Zarifi had also acquired two weapons, a pistol and a rifle, which he had handed over to the

mountain team. Furthermore, Sourki had bought two pistols, which he kept at a safe house. After Sarmadi's arrest in August 1967, and anxious that their safe house could be compromised, Sourki had handed the weapons to Aqayan, who faithfully reported all activities to SAVAK.

In addition to arms, expropriating the bank needed appropriate means of transportation for the attack and the getaway. Around the end of December 1967, Jazani paid for the purchase of two cars to be used by the two teams. Sarmadi bought a car for the urban team, and Choupanzadeh bought another car for the mountain/jungle team. The two cars were supposed to be thrown into the Karaj Lake behind the Karaj dam immediately after the bank robbery.⁶⁹

▪

Once the expropriation plans became more serious, for security reasons, the Group decided not to meet at the house of individual members but to rent safe houses. Sa' id Kalantari rented a house on Abbas-Abad Street, frequented by the mountain/jungle team and the leadership committee. Another house on Pahlavi Street was rented by Sourki and frequented by his urban team. This house was also used for meetings by Jazani, Sourki, and Sarmadi.⁷⁰

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▪

Ghafour Hasanpour's networks: Recruiting behind the scenes

During the academic year 1965–1966, Kianzad created an auxiliary circle of armed struggle sympathizers at Tehran's Polytechnic University. Ghafour Hasanpour was the main figure in this network. He was the untiring recruiter, coordinator, and intermediary who effectively constructed a viable network of sympathizers.⁷¹

▪

From September 1965, the friendship between Kianzad and Hasanpour, who had entered Tehran's Polytechnic University during the academic year of 1962–1963,

developed into a political alliance. Around June 1966, after having met with Jazani, and before his first meeting with Shahrzad, Kianzad put three of his trusted politicized university comrades in touch with Jazani. After his involvement with the mountain team, Kianzad wished to keep a low public profile. He arranged for Jazani to meet Hasanpour, Naser Tolou'i, and M.Z. at Tolou'i's house.⁷²

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Jazani in turn sent Zia-Zarifi to meet the three young men.⁷³

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As Hasanpour and Zia-Zarifi were both from Lahijan, it is suggested that the two already knew one another.⁷⁴

▪

It is highly possible that the attendants at this meeting discussed armed struggle. After this initial contact, the relations between members of Hasanpour's circle at Tehran's Polytechnic University became more and more secretive and clandestine.⁷⁵

▪

Starting in June/July 1966, Hasanpour knew that he had entered an organizational relationship with the Jazani Group. At this time, Hasanpour was already at the centre of three networks which he had personally forged. All three networks were inclined towards armed struggle. Two of these networks were at Tehran's Polytechnic University. The third network was in Lahijan and came about through Hasanpour's influence and connections in his hometown.

Hasanpour was born in 1942. By the time he entered Tehran's Polytechnic University, he was slim and rather tall. He had a charismatic personality and was a charmer capable of influencing and attracting the people who met him. Hasanpour had National Front sympathies, loved to get into discussions and debates, and in his arguments rarely relied on Marxist sources. He was a young man pressed to launch the anti-Shah struggle.⁷⁶

▪

Hasanpour was said to have been a brilliant student, if not a genius, and usually the top of most of his classes at university.⁷⁷

▪

Because of his poor grade in English during his first year at university, he failed one year and finished his studies in five years instead of four. Later, the necessity of reading English language texts compelled him to obtain a firm grasp of the language. It is reported that Hasanpour was involved with translating Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* into Farsi.⁷⁸

▪

It can only be surmised that Hasanpour began his political recruitment in the academic year 1963–1964, during his second year at university.

Hasanpour's first network was composed of students entering Tehran's Polytechnic University, either during the same academic year as him, namely September 1962, or those who came a year earlier or a year later. This network of five members was composed of Sho'a'ollah Moshayyedi (entrant of 1961), Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi (entrant of 1963), Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli, Esma'il Mo'ini-'Araqi, and Seyf Dalil-Safa'i (all three entrants of 1962). By the time Hasanpour met with Zia-Zarifi, in the summer of 1966, all five members of this first network had left the University. Four of them had graduated, and Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi had been expelled. It is mentioned that Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi reasoned that since he was going to be killed in the course of armed struggle, there was no need for him to study.⁷⁹

▪

Hasanpour, however, was in contact with them all after they left the university and drew them back into an active militant network in 1967 and 1968.

Hasanpour's second network was composed of six students recruited between 1964 and 1966: Mahmoud Navabakhsh and Ahmad Khorramabadi (entrants of 1964), Mehdi Same', Mohammad-Hasan Salehpour, and Ebrahim Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i (entrants of 1965), and finally Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i (entrant of 1966). Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i was the only member of Hasanpour's two networks who entered Tehran's Polytechnic University after Hasanpour had met with Zia-Zarifi. The foundation of Hasanpour's network of sympathizers at Tehran's Polytechnic University was primarily established before he met Zia-Zarifi and became connected with the Jazani Group.

On 7 December 1965, Hasanpour had posted a provocative announcement on the windows at Tehran's Polytechnic University. The declaration commemorated the historic day of "16 Azar" (7 December 1953), known in Iran as University

Students' Day, and was entitled, "On the Struggle with the Shah's Dictatorship". Exactly one year later, on 7 December 1966, Hasanpour approached Mehdi Same'i, a student activist with Mosaddeqist and Marxist tendencies, and had lunch with him. Hasanpour was impressed by Same'i's efforts to shut down classes on the University Students' Day of 1966. Later, the two walked in the rain and Hasanpour interviewed Same'i. Hasanpour asked him about the books he was reading, the people he was in contact with, and what he thought of the anti-Shah struggle. That day marked the beginning of a semi-clandestine political relationship between Same'i and Hasanpour.⁸⁰

▪

Around January 1967 (Dey va Bahman 1345), Hasanpour handed Same'i a thirty-five-page typed manuscript and asked him to read it. This was a Farsi translation of Che Guevara's pamphlet on guerrilla warfare. At this meeting, Hasanpour pointed out the necessity of combatting the regime, and added that "if something were to happen, we should be able to help out." Hasanpour also suggested that Same'i should keep an eye out for suitable recruits but should be careful not to divulge his relationship with him to anyone.

At the behest of Hasanpour, a cell composed of Same'i, Navabakhsh, and Noshirvanpour (Chaboksara'i) was established at Tehran's Polytechnic University around February 1967. Same'i and Navabakhsh had been friends since their days at Adab high school in Esfahan, while Same'i and Noshirvanpour had started university together and had become friends in their chemistry class. Throughout 1967, and until the death of Gholam-Reza Takhti on 7 January 1968 (two days before Jazani's arrest), Same'i was primarily involved with open student politics and organizing strikes.⁸¹

▪

Hasanpour's third network was based in Lahijan. It had existed, albeit, in a loose fashion, before Hasanpour met with Zia-Zarifi. It was reactivated after June/July 1966. The Lahijan network was composed of two layers. The core layer included Abolqasem Taherparvar, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, Geda-'Ali Boustani, Reza 'Abedinpour, and Eskandar (Morteza) Rahimi-Meschi. The peripheral layer was composed of Houshang Nayyeri, Manouchehr Baha'ipour, and perhaps Jamshid Taheripour.⁸²

▪

It has been suggested that Hasanpour, with the help of Rahimi-Meschi, founded

a communist network in Lahijan in 1967.⁸³

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It is most likely that the key personality in the Lahijan network was Abolqasem Taherparvar. After July 1966, once contact had been established between Hasanpour and the Jazani Group, Taherparvar met with Zia-Zarifi and Safa'i-Farahani.⁸⁴

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Around July 1969, Houshang Nayyeri introduced his older cousin, Iraj Nayyeri, to Hasanpour.

Notes

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Harun (Parviz) Yashaya'i, Tarikh Irani, Emilie Amra'i, <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/files/70/bodyView/736/>

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(retrieved 18 January 2019).

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Harun (Parviz) Yashaya'i, Tarikh Irani, M. (wishes to remain anonymous), personal interview, Tehran, 21 July 2015.

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B. Jazani, Tarh-e jame'h shenasi va mabani-e estrateji-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e Iran (Tarikh si saleh-e Iran), bakhsh-e dovom, n.p.: Sazeman-e cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran, 1357, p. 199.

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Fasnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 165; "Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi", p. 12. The official date of the formation of the group is set at Norouz 1342 (March 1963).

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 124. Jazani's interrogation reports (avayel-e sal-e 1342).

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Jazani, Tarh-e jame'eh shenasi va mabani-e estrateji-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e Iran, p. 199 (payan-e sal-e 1341).

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 124. Jazani's interrogation reports.

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Khandaniha, 2 Bahman 1338.

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Personal communication with Qasem Rashidi through Kianzad, 30 May 2016; Kianzad, personal communication, 8 June 2016.

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“Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi”, pp. 114, 135.

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Iraj Vahedipour, “Bijan Jazani az zaban-e Iraj Vahedipour”,
<https://sedayeazadibarabari.wordpress.com/2015/04/19/>

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(retrieved 6 April 2018).

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A. Shoja‘ va A. Tayarani, Asnad, bayaniyehha va surat jalesat-e jebheh-ye melli-ye dovom, vol. 1, Tehran: Chapakhash, 1395, p. 58.

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A. Tayarani, Surat jalesat-e kongereh jebheh-ye melli-ye Iran, Tehran: Gam-e no, 1388, p. 224.

14

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Iraj Vahedipour remembers four students. Iraj Vahedipour, “Bijan Jazani az zaban-e Iraj Vahedipour”; Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, Iranian Oral History Project, Harvard University, Transcript 1, Sequence 11–12.

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AbdolKarim Lahidji, Iranian Oral History Project, Harvard University, Transcript 1, Sequence 6–8; Matin-Daftari, Iranian Oral History, Transcript 1, Sequence 11–12.

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Matin-Daftari, Iranian Oral History, Transcript 5, Sequence 83–86.

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Khabarhay-e hafteh, hezb-e mellat-e Iran, chahar shanbeh 9 bahman mah-e 1342, <http://www.forouharha.net/>

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(retrieved 8 October 2017).

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Jazani, Tarh-e jame'eh shenasi va mabani-e estareteji-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e Iran, p. 157.

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Houshang Keshavarz-Sadr, personal interview, 30 February 1997, Paris.

[20](#)

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Iraj Vahedipour, in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 235; Iraj Vahedipour, “Bijan Jazani az zaban-e Iraj Vahedipour”.

[21](#)

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M. (wishes to remain anonymous), personal interview, 26 July 2010, Tehran.

[22](#)

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Keshavarz-Sadr, personal interview, 30 February 1997, Paris.

[23](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 60.

[24](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, pp. 124–127. Jazani’s interrogation reports. Jazani claims that this meeting occurred between March and end of June 1963 (avayel-e sal-e 1342).

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 34, 124–127, 262; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 57.

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 124–127. Jazani’s interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 57–60. For a different account of this organizational chart see: “Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi”, pp. 12–13.

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 125. Jazani’s interrogation reports.

[28](#)

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Hedayatollah Matin-Daftari, personal interview, 28 October 2015, Paris.

[29](#)

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M. (wishes to remain anonymous), personal interview, 21 July 2015, Tehran.

[30](#)

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Payam-e Daneshjou, Farvardin 1343, Khordad 1343,
https://www.forouharha.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/8_BulletinStudenten1343-44-Teil1.pdf

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(retrieved 15 September 2018).

[31](#)

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Hedayatollah Matin-Daftrai, personal interview, 28 October 2015, Paris.

[32](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 261, 367. Interrogation reports of Jazani and Shahrzad; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 62.

[33](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 78, 84, 109; Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 367. Shahrzad's Interrogation reports.

[34](#)

▪

Soudabeh Jazani, personal communication, 10 August 2015. She maintains that Kalantari left a few days after 13 Farvardin 1346; Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK,

Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 128. Bijan Jazani refers to Kalantari's departure date as Farvardin 1346.

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 126. Jazani's interrogation reports and p. 325; Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 180. Sourki's interrogation reports; "Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi", pp. 19–20.

[36](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 64–65.

[37](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 367–369. Interrogation reports of Shahrzad and Jazani.

[38](#)

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Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 127–129. Interrogation reports of Jazani; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 67.

[39](#)

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Qasem Rashidi, personal communication through Kianzad, 30 May 2016.

[40](#)

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M. (wishes to remain anonymous), personal interview, 21 July 2015, Tehran.

[41](#)

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Farrokh Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016, London.

[42](#)

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M. (wishes to remain anonymous), personal interview, 21 July 2015, Tehran; Rashidi, personal correspondence through Kianzad, 30 May 2016; Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

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Rashidi, personal correspondence through Kianzad, 30 May 2016.

[44](#)

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Rashidi, personal correspondence through Kianzad, 30 May 2016.

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Rashidi, personal correspondence through Kianzad, 30 May 2016.

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Negahdar, personal correspondence, 23 January 2019.

[47](#)

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Rashidi, personal correspondence through Kianzad, 30 May 2016; Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

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Information in this paragraph is based on: *Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi*, vol. 2, pp. 128, 159, 181. Interrogation reports of Jazani and Sharzad; *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, pp. 128, 367. Interrogation reports of Jazani and Shahrzad; “*Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi*”, pp. 21–22.

[49](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 181. *Sourki's interrogation reports*.

[50](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 78.

[51](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, pp. 181–182. Sourki's interrogation reports.

[52](#)

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Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 313, 405, 408. Interrogation reports of Sourki and Ahmad Jalil-Afshar; Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 182. Sourki's interrogation reports.

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Soudabeh Jazani, personal correspondence, 10 August 2015.

[54](#)

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Mihan Jazani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 17.

[55](#)

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Mihan Jazani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 31.

[56](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 85.

[57](#)

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Soudabeh Jazani, personal correspondence, 10 August 2015.

[58](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, pp. 182–183. Sourki's interrogation reports; Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Kianzad, personal correspondence, 30 May 2016, 25 January 2019.

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Information in the two paragraphs is based on Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Kianzad, personal correspondence 30 May 2016, 25 January 2019.

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D. Mohammadi-Far, *Rouzshomar-e tarikh-e kouhnavardi va gharnavardi-ye Iran*, Tehran: Entesharat-e sabzan, 1384, pp. 170, 220, 237, 239–240, 251, 255–256.

[61](#)

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Kianzad, personal correspondence, 30 May 2016.

[62](#)

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Mohammadi-Far, p. 245.

[63](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Kianzad, personal correspondence, 30 May 2016.

[64](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 182. Sourki's interrogation reports.

[65](#)

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Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 408. Jalil-Afshar's interrogation reports.

[66](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, p. 182. Sourki's interrogation reports; *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, p. 369. Jazani's interrogation reports.

[67](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, pp. 182–183. Sourki's interrogation reports; *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, pp. 133–135, 408. Interrogation reports of Jazani and Jalil-Afshar.

[68](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, pp. 132, 370; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 90. Jazani's interrogation reports.

[69](#)

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Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 131–132. Jazani's interrogation reports; *Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi*, vol. 2, p. 183. Sourki's interrogation reports.

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, pp. 182, 162. Interrogation reports of Sourki and Jazani; *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, pp. 130, 135, 314. Interrogation reports of Jazani and Sourki.

[71](#)

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Hasanpour's full name was Ghafour Hasanpour Asil Shirjoupisht.

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M.Z. wishes to remain anonymous.

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Kianzad, personal correspondence, 30 May 2016.

[74](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 81.

[75](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016.

[76](#)

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Same', personal interview, 15 September 2015, Paris.

[77](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Kianzad, personal correspondence 30 May 2016.

[78](#)

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Hamaseh Siyahkal, attributed to Hamid Ashraf, Sweden: Baran, 2016, p. 25. The manuscript version of this book was made public by Farrokh Negahdar. Three legally certified handwriting experts in Iran compared the handwritten text of Hamaseh Siyahkal with the handwritten letter of Hamid Ashraf to his parents, on the authenticity of which there is no doubt. These experts concluded that “the authors of the two texts were not the same.” The text Hamaseh Siyahkal is used here not as a work by Hamid Ashraf, but as a primary source, by an anonymous author.

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A. ‘Abdi, *Jonbesh-e daneshjoui-e polyteknik-e Tehran*, Tehran: Nashr-e ney, 1393, p. 178.

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Mehdi Same‘, personal interview, 22 August 2015, Paris.

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Mehdi Same‘, personal interview, 22 August 2015, Paris.

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, vol. 2, pp. 171–173. Hasanpour’s interrogation reports; *Naderi*, vol. 1, pp. 81–82; *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, p. 284; *Jamshid Taheripour, Rouydad Siyahkal, na baleghi-e khod khasteh*, http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/taheripour_4.pdf

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(retrieved 17 June 2018).

[83](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 230. Rahimi-Meschi rejects the validity of this assertion and the date.

[84](#)

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A. Salehi, *Esm-e shab*, Siyahkal, Sweden: Baran, 2016, p. 149.

Jazani Group Compromised

In the afternoon of 8 January 1968, word got around in Tehran, then throughout Iran, that Gholam-Reza Takhti was dead.¹

Takhti, the epic wrestling champion, had been much more than a sportsman and a celebrity; he was a national icon, a pillar of virtue. He represented the soul and spirit of Iranians enamoured with gallantry, humility, selflessness, and discreet service to the downtrodden and the poor. He stood also for political defiance, intransigence, and valour in the face of the mighty and arrogant. In January 1963, during the first and last congress of the Mosaddeqist National Front, Takhti had been elected to its prestigious Council. The invincible and righteous national hero had committed suicide and Iranians were traumatized, trying very hard to cope with the news.

The front pages of the major Iranian dailies on Tuesday, 9 January were dedicated to pictures of Takhti, his tearful wife, Shahla, and their baby son, Babak. However, there was also a tiny four-line piece announcing the arrival of Sheykh Sabah al-Salim al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.²

On Wednesday, 10 January, the Emir was welcomed by the Shah at Mehrabad airport and the two heads of state drove to Ferdowsi Square in a car. At Ferdowsi Square, during an elaborate ceremony, Tehran's mayor presented the Emir with a golden key of the city. Subsequently, the Emir, accompanied by the Shah, drove

once again through the streets of Tehran lined with well-wishers. The last leg of the ceremonial journey from Ferdowsi Square to the Golestan Palace was in the royal carriage.

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First raids

On Tuesday afternoon, 9 January 1968, Sourki and Jazani were arrested. Naser Aqayan, the SAVAK collaborator and informer in Sourki's original group, had tipped off his superiors. A few hours before this arrest, Aqayan had met with Sourki to hand over two pistols. Jazani was to meet with Sourki at Malek Street to obtain the two weapons and hand them over to Sa'id Kalantari. All this preparation had been towards robbing the Cooperative and Distribution Bank.³

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Jazani and Sourki had been under SAVAK's very close surveillance for some time. The timing of their arrest may have been related to them exchanging pistols one day before the arrival of the Emir of Kuwait. SAVAK was probably anxious about the possibility of an attempt on the life of the Shah and the Emir of Kuwait as they paraded through the streets of Tehran. Aqayan's report that weapons were being exchanged and that the Jazani Group was planning some sort of operation raised a red flag. SAVAK took the preventive step to arrest Jazani and Sourki.⁴

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A few handwritten notes were discovered by SAVAK after Jazani's arrest. The suspicious notes included references to street addresses, telephone pylons and wires, pieces of cloth, and morphine. This must have incited SAVAK to round up all members of the Group. Later during his interrogations, Jazani stated that the pieces of paper were a "to do list" related to a bank robbery planned by the Group.⁵

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According to Jazani, at least ten people knew of the Group's planned raid on the Cooperative and Distribution Bank.⁶

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Jazani's arrest sent a warning signal to the active members of his group. Based on previous arrangements, members knew that the coded message "Mrs. Azar has blown her own cover" (Azar khanoum khodash ra lo dad) was a distress signal implying imminent danger. Once the coded message was spoken on the phone, members were to congregate at Gomrok Square in the evening. Sa'id Kalantari was to meet Jazani on the evening of 9 January. When Jazani failed to show up, Kalantari informed the members through the emergency code. In the evening of Thursday, 12 January 1968, Sa'id Kalantari, 'Aziz Sarmadi, 'Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, Mohammad Choupanzadeh, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, and Hamid Ashraf gathered at Gomrok Square. All seven members of the military branch got into Sarmadi's car, a Buick, and headed towards Chalous in Mazandaran. They were each carrying a backpack full of medicine, first aid supplies, staples such as dates, raisins, and dried bread, maps, and clothing. The Group possessed two revolvers and a Colt pistol.⁷

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Zia-Zarifi and Saffari-Ashtiyani were the two important figures of the Group missing. On the same day that the seven set out on their trip towards the North, Zia-Zarifi went into hiding.⁸

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It is not quite known whether he had been contacted at all, and if so, why he did not accompany his comrades. All that is known is that after the arrest of Jazani and Sourki, contact between Zia-Zarifi and the rest of the core members was ruptured until the return of the group from their trip. For some unknown reason, Saffari-Ashtiyani was contacted by the group only after their week-long trip.⁹

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Threatened by the arrest of Jazani and Sourki, and worried that they might all be compromised, Kalantari, the practical leader of the mountain/jungle team, decided on the excursion to keep the military group out of harm's way. Also, the trip provided the Group with time to reflect on their future course of action. Sarmadi dropped off his passengers at Alamdeh, located in the vicinity of Nour, and immediately returned to Tehran to look for a safe house. The remaining six began their foray into the forest areas surrounding Alamdeh.

On the second day of their walk, discussions revolved around the Group's future. Ashraf and Kalantari believed the Group should begin their armed uprising immediately and spoke about attacking a gendarmerie station. Kianzad was among those who disagreed with this course of action. Those opposed to immediate armed engagement argued that since the reason for Jazani's arrest was unknown, any radical action on their part could jeopardize the situation of those arrested. Furthermore, it was argued that the Group was not prepared to undertake such an initiative. Ashraf was the most adamant proponent of an immediate operation.¹⁰

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Eventually, the Group abandoned the idea of launching a strike. They returned to Tehran on Friday, 19 January to meet with Sarmadi at Foziyeh Square.

On 16 January 1968, three days after he had dropped off his comrades at Alamdeh, Aziz Sarmadi was arrested while accompanying his pregnant wife to the hospital. Zerar Zahediyan was picked up at his place of work by security forces on 21 January 1968.¹¹

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Heshmatollah Shahrzad, one of the three founders of the original Jazani Group, who had left the Group sometime around October 1967, was arrested on 5 February.¹²

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In June 1967, the leadership committee of the Jazani Group had been composed of Jazani, Shahrzad, Zia-Zarifi, Sourki, and Zahediyan.¹³

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With the arrest of Shahrzad, only Zia-Zarifi from the leadership committee remained at large.

Following the arrest of Shahrzad, the political branch of the Group was rounded up. Jazani held Shahrzad or comrade "B" responsible for divulging information and exposing the Group.¹⁴

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Majid Ahsan and Farrokh Negahdar were arrested on 8 February 1968, while Qasem Rashidi, the third member of this circle, was picked up on 10 February.

Kiyoumars Izadi, another original member of the Jazani Group, who had left in 1966, was arrested on 8 February 1968.¹⁵

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After the arrest of Jazani and Sourki, Zia-Zarifi had gone underground with the help of Iraj Vahedipour. The latter was a member of the Tudeh Party's Tehran Organization (Tashkilat-e Tehran-e hezb-e tudeh). 'Abbas-'Ali Shahryari, the leader of this organization, was a long-standing SAVAK informant. While Zia-Zarifi was in hiding, Shahryari had met with him and knew of his whereabouts.¹⁶

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Once they returned from their trip, the Group commissioned Safa'i-Farahani and Jalil-Afshar to re-establish contact with Zia-Zarifi. Around 21 January, Jalil-Afshar had moved into a safe house on Roudaki Street (Salsabil) with Safa'i-Farahani, Choupanzadeh, and Kianzad.¹⁷

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Jalil-Afshar was eventually able to schedule a meeting with Zia-Zarifi on Wednesday, 14 February 1968. Shahryari, however, tipped off SAVAK. Jalil-Afshar went to the meeting accompanied by Kianzad, who was to keep watch on him from a distance. Zia-Zarifi, who had been under surveillance, and Jalil-Afshar met at the eastern side of Farah Park in Tehran. Before they knew it, both were arrested at 19:00. The sweep took place so fast that, unable to intervene and help, Kianzad escaped from the scene and informed his comrades of the raid.¹⁸

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Between 9 January and 14 February 1968, the original leadership of the Jazani Group was decimated. All five members of the leadership committee, Jazani, Shahrzad, Zia-Zarifi, Sourki, and Zahedian, were behind bars. Sarmadi (alias Shahidi) and Jalil-Afshar (alias Peyvandi), both members of Sourki's urban team of the military branch, were also arrested. Ahsan, Qasemi, and Negahdar, members of the political circle, were arrested. Izadi's arrest meant that anyone associated with the Group, even if no longer affiliated with it, was susceptible to being arrested. By 14 February 1968, eleven people connected to the Jazani Group had been taken into custody.

Among the eleven, some had seriously entertained ideas about armed operations and bank robberies and had even prepared for them. A few had acquired arms, none of which had fired a bullet. Members of the Group had led a public life.

Those who were employed had gone to work and those who were university students showed up for classes. Some had frequented safe houses without having broken contact with their families. A handful of them had participated in a few mountain climbing expeditions looking for suitable territory for possible guerrilla activities. The Jazani Group had not entered the active phase of armed struggle and had spent some four and a half years preparing for it.

There is little doubt that the Jazani Group had decided that the only successful way to save the country was through a guerrilla organization, but by the time their leadership was arrested, they had not put their theory into practice. Later, Ahmadzadeh referred to the legacy of the Jazani Group in a somewhat dismissive tone. He wrote, “Some appeared (kesani peyda shodand) who wanted to engage in armed struggle by means that are not clear to us. However, they were imprisoned before they started and were therefore unable to leave behind their experiences, positive or negative.”¹⁹

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The remnants of the Jazani Group under siege

As news of further arrests reached the remaining six key members of the Group, they felt besieged. Unable to identify how their organization had been compromised, they felt frustrated and powerless. The remnants of the Group, Safa'i-Farahani, Sa'id Kalantari, Saffari-Ashtiyani, Kianzad, Choupanzadeh, and Ashraf, all members of the military branch, were fighting for survival. It was during this period that Ghafour Hasanpour, who had been associated with the Jazani Group since June/July 1966 but had not been a part of it, was brought into the inner circle. Hasanpour, a firm believer in armed struggle, possessed at least three non-infiltrated and non-compromised networks. On Friday, 19 January, upon returning from their trip to the North, the remnants of the Group established contact with Hasanpour through Kianzad.²⁰

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The arrest of Jalil-Afshar in the evening of 14 February 1968 compelled members of the Group to find new and safe living quarters. Their safe house on Roudaki Street, where Jalil-Afshar lived with Safa'i-Farahani, Choupanzadeh, and Kianzad, was compromised and had to be evacuated quickly. A new place, located around Baharestan and on a street parallel to Jaleh Street, was rented by Hasanpour. He, Safa'i-Farahani, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Choupanzadeh took up residence there. Another room was rented by Ashraf or Hasanpour and frequented by Kianzad on Mo'insoltan Street.²¹

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Finally, Sa'id Kalantari opted to live with his family and separately from other members.

Once the remaining members were safely settled, they proceeded to re-establish contact with sympathizers and like-minded comrades who would potentially join their cause. They remained committed to armed struggle and the simultaneous launching of rural and urban operations.²²

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To this end, they sought to reorganize and expand the Group, especially since with the arrest of their members, they had lost contact with some of their sympathizers. Hasanpour first approached a circle of sympathizers at Tehran's Polytechnic University around 16 February 1968. Same' recalled that, having disappeared after Jazani's arrest, Hasanpour surfaced around mid-February 1968 and announced that certain comrades had been arrested. Hasanpour told potential recruits that the Group was being reconstituted, and that "professionals" were needed to serve in it. Hasanpour instructed Same' to stop all his student-related public activities.²³

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In mid-February 1968, Safa'i-Farahani and Kianzad approached Eskandar Sadeqinejad, whom they both knew very well.²⁴

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Sadeqinejad, who was about twenty-eight years old, was friends with Jalil Enferadi, who was some twenty-five years old. Both were metalworkers and members of the Syndicate of Mechanical Steel Workers (founded in 1960) and had old connections with the members of the Group. On 9 May 1962, Sadeqinejad and Sa'id Kalantari had been among the first graduates of the

Tehran Mountaineering Association. In 1963, both Sadeqinejad and Enferadi, along with Naser Garschi, had founded the Mountain-Climbing Organization of the Syndicate of Metal and Mechanical Workers (Sazeman-e kouhnavardi-e sandika-ye felezkar va mekanik).²⁵

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Sa' id Kalantari, Safa' i-Farahani, Sadeqinejad, and Enferadi were old friends and excellent mountain climbers. All four had been on mountain climbing expeditions. In 1966, Sadeqinejad had informed Kianzad that he was eager to engage in radical anti-regime activities.²⁶

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Sadeqinejad accepted an offer to join the Group in February 1968, and Enferadi followed suit.

By February 1968, at least five of the remnants of the Group had stopped living normal lives and were mostly underground. Ashraf, along with Hasanpour, led a semi-clandestine life. The Group remained committed to reorganizing and pursuing their political objectives. For this they needed financial resources. Around April 1968, the Group planned three bank robberies.

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Bank robberies

The first plan for a bank robbery was rather half-baked if not outright absurd. It involved Reza ' Abedinpour, a member of Hasanpour's Lahijan network. Hasanpour arranged a meeting between ' Abedinpour and Saffari-Ashtiyani. ' Abedinpour, who worked at the Saderat Bank in Siyahkal, was instructed by Safa' i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani to rob the vault of his own bank. ' Abedinpour emptied the vault and handed over 75,000 tomans to the Group. When Hasanpour and Kianzad were informed of the operation, they opposed the heist, arguing that it would undoubtedly compromise ' Abedinpour, lead to his

arrest, and endanger the Group. They both insisted that ‘Abedinpour return the money, which he did.²⁷

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According to another account of this operation, narrated by Sa‘id Kalantari, the purpose of this exercise had been to test the dexterity and ability of Hasanpour’s new recruits.²⁸

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The whole operation, which was intended to secure funds, was amateurish and most of all clumsy and uncoordinated.

Soon after the failure of the first attempt to raise money, sometime in late April 1968, the Group planned on robbing Bank Saderat in Ramsar. Those involved in this operation were Kianzad, Safa’i-Farahani, Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Geda-‘Ali Boustani, another member of Hasanpour’s Lahijan circle. Boustani first prepared a feasibility report on the operation. Safa’i-Farahani and Kianzad followed up by visiting the location. The bank’s layout and plan were sketched by Hasanpour and Ashraf. Yet for some unknown reason, the project was abandoned.²⁹

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After these unsuccessful attempts, the Group decided to return to a previous project which had been studied before Jazani’s arrest. This third bank robbery plan was suggested by Saffari-Ashtiyani. The idea originated when Saffari-Ashtiyani realized that one of his relatives owned a van which delivered meat from the main slaughterhouse of Tehran to various butcher shops, then returned and deposited the collected cash payments at the Cooperative and Distribution Bank, located near Tehran’s slaughterhouse.³⁰

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The new project was, therefore, not to raid the bank itself, as was originally planned, but to ambush the van once it had completed its rounds and was on its way back to deposit the cash at the bank. The members involved in this operation were Sa‘id Kalantari, Sadeqinejad, Kianzad, and Ashraf.

At around 19:30 one evening in April/May 1968, Kalantari and Sadeqinejad, riding on a Zschopau motorbike and disguised as policemen, intercepted the van on Jaleh Street. They informed the driver that they were looking for contraband goods and forcefully took the attaché bag stuffed with cash. Kalantari and

Sadeqinejad rode away with the money and handed it to Kianzad who was standing at a distance from the ambush. Kianzad, in turn, handed the bag to Ashraf who walked with some 75,000 to 80,000 tomans to his room on Mo'insoltan Street. Both Kalantari and Sadeqinejad were armed but were instructed to use their weapons solely for the purpose of intimidation. After this first successful operation, some 20,000 tomans of the "confiscated" money went to purchasing a big house at the end of Hashemi Street. Sa'id Kalantari and his family moved into this house, and Safa'i-Farahani, Saffari-Ashtiyani, Choupanzadeh, and Kianzad moved into one of its rooms.³¹

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The decision to leave the country

Within about a month of the successful bank robbery, the five most senior members of the Group, Safa'i-Farahani, Sa'id Kalantari, Kianzad, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Choupanzadeh, decided to leave the country. The Jazani Group had been planning to commence operations since 1966. It may seem somewhat puzzling why they would decide to go abroad so abruptly once they had succeeded in their first operation. Two explanations exist.

The first explanation is that around the end of May 1968, before the successful heist, the Group had received information from Jazani that Naser Aqayan was a SAVAK spy. Jazani also sent word that, based on questions that he was asked during his interrogations, the identities of five members were known to the authorities. Safa'i-Farahani, Sa'id Kalantari, Kianzad, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Choupanzadeh were exposed and were in danger of being arrested. According to Kianzad, it was on Jazani's insistence that the five decided to leave. Kianzad recalled that "when Jazani instructed us to leave, we did not resist." Kianzad's understanding was that the directive was to leave, reorganize, and return.³²

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The second explanation is based on Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports.

Safa'i-Farahani referred to the constant surveillance and hounding that the remaining members of the Group were subjected to after the arrests of Jazani and Zia-Zarifi. SAVAK had discovered their hideouts, one after the other, making their lives miserable, forcing them to be constantly on the move. Safa'i-Farahani maintained that, at one point, the five had decided that "staying only meant trouble and that it was best to leave Iran". Safa'i-Farahani reasoned that their decision to leave the country was supported by two other considerations. First, they would be able to join the PLO and fight against imperialism and Israel. Second, "if someday they were to return to Iran, they would have the necessary military preparedness for armed struggle."³³

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Kianzad agreed that they had felt threatened as they were under attack, yet he did not recall a sense of desperation and resignation among the members of the Group.³⁴

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Whatever the reasons may have been, after some five months of constant harassment by SAVAK, Safa'i-Farahani, Sa'id Kalantari, Kianzad, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Choupanzadeh felt dispirited. Exhaustion added to a sense of insecurity and vulnerability, rendering them ever more nervous and fragile. The Group did not have a plan of action, a general road map, backup plans in case things went wrong, and most importantly a sense of direction and purpose. With the leadership behind bars, it seemed the ship had lost its captain. The feeling of disorientation and discombobulation was only exacerbated in time.

There are many ways to interpret Jazani's instruction that the senior members of his group leave, rather than stay behind and prepare for armed struggle. Did Jazani think that, after some four or five years of preparation, his group was incapable of pursuing their original military objectives? Was he effectively calling for disbanding the Group? As history would tell, the Group would have withered without Hasanpour and Ashraf.

The five members designated to leave the country explored the possibility of escaping to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, or Iraq. Once they agreed on Iraq, their rushed decision to leave Iran led to a fatal mistake. Through Sa'id Kalantari's brother, Mas'oud Kalantari, they had sought assistance from the Tudeh Party's Tehran Organization. The Group was unaware that SAVAK had thoroughly infiltrated this organization. It was ignorant about the fact that its

leader, Shahryari, a SAVAK informant, was responsible for the arrest of Zia-Zarifi and Jalil-Afshar. Delighted with the exceptional opportunity of handing over all five wanted men to SAVAK, Shahryari suggested that he would organize the crossing into Iraq. Uncomfortable with the idea of crossing all at the same time, the five decided to leave in two separate groups. The plan was that the second group would cross once the first one had reached its destination safely.³⁵

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On another tip from Shahryari, in June 1968, SAVAK tracked Sa'id Kalantari back to the new and spacious house that the Group had bought on Hashemi Street. The house was subsequently placed under surveillance to arrest Kalantari. One day, as Kianzad was returning to the house, he recognized Doctor Javan (Parviz Bahman-Farnejad), who had been his interrogator back in 1965. Javan was leaning against a black Mercedes on the street leading to their house. Kianzad managed to enter the house from another entrance and informed his comrades. The house was quickly evacuated and Kalantari, his family, Safa'i-Farahani, Saffari-Ashtiyani, Choupanzadeh, and Kianzad found themselves stranded, looking for shelter.³⁶

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In mid-June 1968, Safa'i-Farahani, Kalantari, Kianzad, and Choupanzadeh left Tehran for Karaj. The four lived in two tents close to the Karaj River for two weeks. Meanwhile, they were waiting for Shahryari to arrange their escape to Iraq. This kind of outdoors experience was not unusual, as during the summer people camped out in the area. Saffari-Ashtiyani, the missing member of their group, had gone his own way and had found a safe place to stay. Nevertheless, he continued to stay in contact with the other four.³⁷

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The final nabs

On 11 July 1968, Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani successfully crossed the

border. They sent a telegram to the effect that “we have safely arrived at Karbala.” This was the code they had agreed on and it implied that the coast was clear for the second group to cross into Iraq.³⁸

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At the end of July, Kalantari, Kianzad, and Choupanzadeh felt that they could safely follow their comrades. Little did they know that SAVAK had planned for the first group to cross safely to arrest the remaining three. After the first wave of arrests, SAVAK had focused on Sa‘id Kalantari, whom they believed was a person of great interest.

Travelling on forged passports with fake names, the three took a night bus from Tehran to Khorramshahr around 6 August 1968.³⁹

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From Khorramshahr, the contact who had been introduced by Shahryari drove them in a Chevrolet to a smuggler’s hut right on the river dividing Iran and Iraq. Ten minutes after their arrival, they were surrounded by army units, arrested, and taken to SAVAK headquarters in Ahvaz. Kianzad remembered that there, Doctor Javan (Parviz Bahman-Farnejad) awaited them.⁴⁰

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The following day they were dispatched to Evin prison in Tehran, which at the time housed only a few prisoners. At Evin, they were placed in solitary confinement, interrogated, and tortured for three months. Subsequently, around November 1968, they were transferred to Shahrebani prison where they joined the other eleven.⁴¹

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On 30 December 1968, almost a year after Jazani’s arrest, the trial of the “Group of 14” opened in Tehran. A military tribunal was prosecuting the Group on charges of “founding a communist group and propagating communist ideas”, as well as conducting “activities against state security”. In other words, this was a political trial prosecuted in a military tribunal. The Iranian press did not name the defendants. It did, however, report that domestic and international journalists attended their trial.⁴²

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The press also speculated about the punishments handed down. It commented

that even though the penalty for such activities could be as severe as execution, the military prosecutor had asked for anywhere between three to ten years of imprisonment.⁴³

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On 15 January 1969, the military tribunal passed down its verdict. Jazani was condemned to fifteen years in solitary confinement due to aggravated circumstances of his previous condemnation in 1965. Kalantari, Zia-Zarifi, Sourki, Shahrzad, Zahediyani, Sarmadi, and Jalil-Afshar each received a ten-year jail sentence. Kianzad and Choupanzadeh were each condemned to eight years in prison. Kiyoumars Izadi and Negahdar were condemned to six years and five years, respectively, while Ahsan and Rashidi each received a three-year jail sentence.⁴⁴

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Notes

[1](#)

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Ettela'at, 18 Dey 1346.

[2](#)

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Ettela'at, 19 Dey 1346.

[3](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 132, 356.

[4](#)

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Qane'ifard, p. 334.

[5](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 135, 136. Jazani's interrogation report.

[6](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 133.

[7](#)

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All information in this paragraph is based on Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016. According to Shahrzad, the code was “Azar khanoum mariz ast”, Mrs. Azar is sick. See: Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 368.

[8](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 53.

[9](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[10](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 98.

[12](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 130; “Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi”, p. 24.

[13](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 367–369.

[14](#)

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“Gorouh-e Jazani Zarifi”, p. 24.

[15](#)

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Dates of arrest of Ahsan, Rashidi, Negahdar, and Izadi are based on N. Mohajer and M. Baba ‘Ali, Be zaban-e qanoun, Berkeley: Nashr-e noghteh, 1395, pp. 21–22.

[16](#)

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A-H. Zia-Zarifi, p. 53; Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, tashkilat-e Tehran-e hezb-e tudeh, vol. 16, Tehran: Markaz-e barrasi-e asnad-e tarikhi-e

vezarat-e ettela'at, 1392, p. 151.

[17](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 406; Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[18](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[19](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 22.

[20](#)

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Kianzad, personal correspondence, 30 May 2016.

[21](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016. Kianzad maintains that the room was rented by Ashraf; Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 174. In his interrogations, Hasanpour maintains that he rented this room and another.

[22](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 103.

[23](#)

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Mehdi Same[‘] in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 133.

[24](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[25](#)

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Mohammadi-Far, pp. 207, 247.

[26](#)

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Mohammad Kianzad, a seven-page typed “memoir” kindly given to me on 6 January 2016.

[27](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 82–83, 102–103, 106; *Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi*, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 172–174.

[28](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 120. Sa‘id Kalantari’s interrogation reports.

[29](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 106; Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016. Kianzad’s memory of this operation is vague.

[30](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 118–119. Sa‘id Kalantari’s interrogation reports.

[31](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 86, 106. Sa‘id Kalantari maintains that the operation yielded around 45,000 tomans; *Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi*, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 119.

[32](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016.

[33](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 205. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogations.

[34](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016.

[35](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[36](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016.

[37](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 109.

[38](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 110, 133, 135.

[39](#)

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The approximate date is based on the information provided in the interrogations of Kianzad and Kalantari on 5 December 1968 at the Military Tribunals (Edareh dadresi-e artesh 14/8/47). Mohajer and Baba-‘Ali, p. 48 refer to 23 Tir 1347 (14 July 1968) as the date of departure.

[40](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 110.

[41](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 7 January 2016.

[42](#)

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Ettela‘at, 9 Dey 1347.

[43](#)

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Ettelaʻat, 11 Dey 1347.

[44](#)

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Ettelaʻat, 26 Dey 1347.

The New Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa 'i-Farahani Group: Preparations and Operations

By August 1968, fourteen members of the Jazani Group, including its entire leadership committee, the political branch, and all but three members of its military branch, were in prison. Of the three remaining members of the military branch, Safa 'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani were abroad. The Group had effectively been neutralized and wiped out. No written manifesto was at hand to put forth clearly the ideology, position, and methodology of the Group. Hamid Ashraf remained the single unexposed member of the Jazani Group partially familiar with the Group's history, plans, and activities since April/May 1966. He remained the only link of the remnants of the Jazani Group with its past.

Sadeqinejad and Hasanpour were also in Iran, not compromised and free. Even though Hasanpour had been in contact with the Jazani Group since June/July 1966, his association had been lateral rather than central. He had not been a member of the Jazani Group. Until the 1968 waves of arrests, Sadeqinejad's association with the Group had been more as an adjunct than a member. There is no mention of Sadeqinejad being a member of any of the circles, teams, or branches in place before the arrest of Jazani and Sourki. Even though important members of the Group, such as Kalantari, Safa 'i-Farahani, and Kianzad, had known Sadeqinejad since around 1962, it was not until mid-February 1968 that he officially joined the Group and participated in its operations.

Hasanpour's status was different. Between June/July 1966 and January 1968, he had weaved a highly impressive web of some twenty members. Hasanpour's

recruits were intentionally kept in the dark about any connection with the Jazani Group. The number of those enlisted in Hasanpour's networks fluctuated. New members joined, while others quit, choosing to lead a normal life. It would be safe to say that, due to Hasanpour's recruitment of potential revolutionaries, the size of his lateral networks grew disproportionately to that of Jazani's core Group. The asymmetrical relationship worsened as the number of core members behind bars increased during 1968. In terms of numerical preponderance and organizational coherence, Hasanpour's lateral networks became much more significant than the remnants of the original core Group. From January 1968, after Kianzad contacted Hasanpour at the Group's behest, the latter played a determining role in shaping a new group.

In addition to Ashraf, Sadeqinejad, and Hasanpour, there was the enigmatic figure of Moshiri. Moshiri was said to have been brought into the Group by Jazani and Zia-Zarifi, with whom he had shared political history.¹

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It is most probable that Moshiri's real name was Parviz Shari'atzadeh.²

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In late March 1968, Sa'id Kalantari had asked Kianzad to contact Moshiri, who had an office on Amirakram Square. Moshiri had quickly won the respect and confidence of not only the junior recruits whom he trained, but that of Kalantari, Safa'i-Farahani, Kianzad, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Choupanzadeh. Moshiri was remembered as a well-dressed, tall, dark, and affable figure, who was a stickler for following security procedures. He is said to have been from Lorestan, and a true professional in the field of clandestine activities. He instructed his revolutionary apprentices in the arts of surveillance and counter-surveillance, identifying and losing tails, evasion and camouflage, mapping and surveying the city, and methods of establishing contact and signalling clandestine comrades.³

•

In around April 1968, Hasanpour had instructed Same' to meet Moshiri. The two had met on Manouchehri Street, and Moshiri had instructed Same' to rent a safe house in the southern part of the city. He had introduced himself as 'Ala'i, another alias. Moshiri would meet individually with members of Hasanpour's second network from Tehran's Polytechnic University, at Same's rental house on Amiriyeh Street. Moshiri informed his pupils that the Group was committed to "armed struggle and to overthrow the Shah's dictatorship", and that their

responsibility was to support the revolutionary efforts in the city.⁴

▪

Once Kalantari, Safa'i-Farahani, Kianzad, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Choupanzadeh decided to leave the country, they designated Ashraf, Sadeqinejad and Moshiri as the core nucleus responsible for managing the Group and carrying through its objectives.⁵

▪

Moshiri had been zealously training Same'i, Mahmoud Navabakhsh, and Hasan Salehpour, when he suddenly broke all ties with the Group and vanished around October 1968. His sudden disappearance was concurrent with the news that Kalantari, Kianzad, and Choupanzadeh had been arrested. Once Moshiri disappeared, Hasanpour picked up the relay, before he passed it on to Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli.⁶

▪

Now the transition team left behind from the Jazani Group consisted of Ashraf, Hasanpour, and Sadeqinejad, whose true identities still remained hidden from the authorities, and who were willing to carry out the preparation phase of armed struggle.⁷

▪

The arrest of Kalantari, Kianzad, and Choupanzadeh, as they were crossing the border, displayed fault lines in the old group's security system. The sense of vulnerability among the remaining leading players led them naturally to exercise caution, and they recoiled. Contacts were not followed through, links were severed, and ties were ruptured, as members and sympathizers sought to secure themselves by keeping a low profile.

From October 1968, Hasanpour began picking up the broken pieces by re-establishing old contacts. He worked on two fronts. He re-established contact with Ashraf around the end of October.⁸

▪

Ashraf and Hasanpour agreed to work together to reconstitute the Group and continue with the anti-Shah struggle. At this time, Hasanpour introduced Ashraf to Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli, who was effectively replacing Moshiri. Hasanpour also renewed contacts with his three networks. Around the end of October 1968,

Hasanpour went to the house Same' shared with two other friends on Farvardin Street. The two met on four or five successive days. Hasanpour informed Same' of the arrest of a group of comrades – the Jazani Group – and insisted on continuing the struggle.

In one of these late October meetings, Hasanpour instructed Same' to contact Fazeli, who was to pick up where Moshiri had left off. Around October/November 1968, Same' met with Fazeli and the two held regular weekly meetings until October 1969. During this period, discussions and debates stretched late into the night and Same' slept over at Fazeli's house on Shahreza Street. Seyf Dalil-Safa'i, who lived with Fazeli, participated in the conversations.⁹

-

It would be fair to say that, from around September/October 1968, the original Jazani Group's political life came to an end. From this date onward, under the effective leadership of Ashraf and Hasanpour, a new and transformed group emerged.

In his One-Year Assessment of Urban and Rural Guerrilla Struggle in Iran, Ashraf posited that three cadres of the Jazani Group, whose identities were not known to the police, remained in Iran to “organize a new group based on the experiences of the defeated group”. According to Ashraf, this new group later became known as the Jungle Group (Gorouh-e jangal).¹⁰

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In his work Three-Year Assessment, Ashraf systematically referred to the Jungle Group and traced it to the initial founders, Jazani, Sourki, and Zahedian, without mentioning Zia-Zarifi. According to Ashraf, this group, which later came to be known as the Jazani Group, spent one year preparing the conditions for armed struggle, but “the cadres of this group were completely inexperienced when it came to organizing armed action.”¹¹

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Picking up the broken pieces

From around October 1968 until the eventual return of Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani to Iran in June 1970, Hasanpour and Ashraf, with Sadeqinejad at their side, were responsible for recruitment, reorganization, and setting up specialized teams. Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli was the other personality who also played a key leadership role during this period.¹²

▪

Hasanpour and Fazeli had both entered Tehran's Polytechnic University in 1962 and had quickly become close political associates, actively engaged in student politics.¹³

▪

Fazeli was a member of Hasanpour's first political network.

As the Group was being reconstructed around November 1968, Hasanpour informed certain members of his networks that, after the arrest of a group of comrades, "they were all by themselves and needed to do something." His plan was to organize a professional and powerful mountain team, as he was convinced that armed struggle should start in the mountainous regions. While the epicentre of the struggle would be in mountainous regions, organized urban cells would act as peripheral support units.¹⁴

▪

For Hasanpour, the mountain vanguard needed to be supported by an urban base in its proximity. With this in mind, sometime in December 1968, Same' was dispatched to Lahijan, where Hasanpour had a network, and was put into contact with the nineteen-year-old Manouchehr Baha'ipour, a Hasanpour recruit.¹⁵

▪

Same' met with Baha'ipour every weekend and discussed Marxist theory with him. This meant that he had to commute between Tehran and Lahijan regularly. Same's assignment in Lahijan, which lasted until June 1969, was to establish a support network for the eventual guerrilla operations in the adjacent mountains. Around June 1969, Mehdi Same' handed Baha'ipour over to Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i.¹⁶

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Organizing armed struggle: Three teams

Around October 1968, drawing mainly upon his own recruits, Hasanpour constituted three specialized teams: urban, mountain, and weapons procurement.¹⁷

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The twenty-six-year-old Hasanpour was a man with a great talent for recruitment and organization. The urban team, or urban support team, was led by Fazeli, and composed of Mehdi Same‘, Houshang Delkhah, and Seyf Dalil-Safa‘i. Delkhah was a precision instrument manufacturer (tarashkar), and a mountain climber. He was a classmate of Safa‘i-Farahani at the Narmak Institute of Technology and subsequently became a close friend of his. Delkhah was also a primary-school friend of Kianzad at the Roudaki School in Tehran. After Safa‘i-Farahani’s departure from Iran, it was Hasanpour who tracked down Delkhah and put him in contact with Seyf Dalil-Safa‘i.

The urban team was responsible for mapping, surveying, and mastering the topography of Tehran, as well as identifying the homes of influential political and economic figures. It was also in charge of storing food, provisions, and first-aid material in the mountains, north of Tehran. Finally, drawing upon its members’ academic and technical knowledge, the urban team worked on producing explosives, especially TNT.¹⁸

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Ashraf led the mountain team, which included ‘Abbas Danesh-Behzadi and Ebrahim Noshirvanpour.¹⁹

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The mountain team was in charge of exploration and reconnaissance missions around the central Alborz region, and the forest and valley areas known as

“2,000” and “3,000”, from Shahsavari (in Mazandaran province) to Qazvin.²⁰

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The main task of the mountain team was to map the northern regions of the country and create a topographical information bank.²¹

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To physically prepare the Group, Ashraf conducted mountain climbing excursions to the Zagros and Alborz regions, ascending the Hezar mountain in Kerman, and the peaks of the Dena mountain ranges in the Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad provinces. These mountain peaks, of over 4,000 metres, could be treacherous. In September 1969, almost a year before launching the Siyahkal mission, Ashraf led a group of some twenty-five mountain climbers associated with Tehran University’s Faculty of Engineering to the Kholeno peak. Even though this excursion seemed like a harmless mountain hike, Ashraf was conducting his reconnaissance mission of the mountainous region between Tehran and the Northern Province of Mazandaran, while seeking out suitable talents for recruitment.²²

•

A third team, composed of Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, and Hasanpour, was in charge of weapons procurement.²³

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In August 1968, Hasanpour visited Rahimi-Meschi at his house in Lahijan, gave him 2,000 tomans and asked him to buy three pistols.²⁴

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Rahimi-Meschi, a member of Hasanpour’s Lahijan circle, and a literacy-corps teacher, was stationed in a village around Reza’iyeh (Azarbaijan). Same’ and Hasanpour travelled to Reza’iyeh around December 1968, met with Rahimi-Meschi, and returned to Tehran with three Colts neatly packed in three confectionary boxes.²⁵

•

On Hasanpour’s request, Rahimi-Meschi ended up purchasing a total of twelve pistols and two Brno rifles for the Group.²⁶

•

During the reorganization of teams in April 1969, the weapons procurement team was disbanded and Rahimi-Meschi and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri were transferred to the urban team. By spring 1969, Hamid Ashraf was overseeing the mountain team, Fazeli had taken charge of the urban team, and Hasanpour was acting as the overarching liaison person between the two teams.²⁷

▪

In fall 1969, Hasanpour instructed Iraj Nayyeri, a member of the Lahijan Group, to transfer his place of work to a school in the village of Shabkhoslat (Shaqouzlat), close to Siyahkal.²⁸

▪

Hasanpour was looking for a foothold in the proximity of the Deylaman mountain range. The small rural school close to Siyahkal was to serve as Hasanpour's base from where he could send reconnaissance expeditions to survey the surrounding mountainous terrain. Iraj Nayyeri's presence in Shabkhoslat (Shaqouzlat), constituted the opening move of Hasanpour's elaborate chess game. Hasanpour wished to familiarize his team with the area and in the process identify the most appropriate location for a strike. He was also interested in surveying the mountainous areas in the vicinity for their suitability as an immediate logistical support base. Hasanpour was looking for a fallback region once military operations were launched, and a long-term guerrilla operation base.

In October 1969, Hasanpour and Houshang Nayyeri, Iraj's younger cousin, visited Iraj Nayyeri at his school, and from there began a tour of the region. The following month, Houshang Nayyeri, accompanied by Sho'a'ollah Moshayyedi, visited Iraj Nayyeri at Shabkhoslat. Moshayyedi had been a member of Hasanpour's first network at Tehran's Polytechnic University. From October to December 1969, Moshayyedi and the two Nayyeris went on reconnaissance missions around the mountainous and forest regions of Shabkhoslat, with a focus on Kakouh. The fact that Moshayyedi, a member of the urban team, was participating in activities that should have been specific to the mountain team, demonstrates that at the end of 1969, the distinctions and separations between teams were not all that rigid.

By January 1970, Iraj Nayyeri had met Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, another member of Hasanpour's first network at Tehran's Polytechnic University. From this time on, the reconnaissance expeditions by Iraj Nayyeri and Bandehkhoda-

Langaroudi, in and around Kakouh, became more regular and systematic. Iraj Nayyeri had studied a few pamphlets by Che Guevara, and knew he was implicated in a group, although he had not heard of Jazani's name. In February/March 1970, before leaving for compulsory military service, Hasanpour introduced Iraj Nayyeri to Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i, an able mountain climber, and a member of Hasanpour's second network at Tehran's Polytechnic University.²⁹

▪

On 1 April 1970, Iraj Nayyeri met Sama'i on Langaroud's Chamkhaleh Road, and the two made their way towards the mountains. By this time, Hasanpour had most probably identified Siyahkal as the target of the Group's military operations. Consequently, he commissioned Sama'i to begin discreetly storing food and provisions in the mountainous region of Kakouh. Kakouh was some five and a half kilometres away from Siyahkal. On foot, during November, the distance between Iraj Nayyeri's school at Shabkhoslat (Shaqouzlat) and the peak of Kakouh, at approximately 1,000 metres, could be covered in about four hours.³⁰

▪

From April to the end of August 1970, Iraj Nayyeri regularly accompanied Sama'i on reconnaissance expeditions to the Kakouh mountain. On one of these expeditions, Sama'i informed Iraj Nayyeri that their mission was to identify suitable sites for storage depots on the mountain to stockpile food and equipment for the guerrilla operation planned for the next year. Nayyeri and Sama'i spent some four months digging at least three storage depots, placing food in them, camouflaging them, and marking them for future use. Foodstuffs, such as cans of tuna fish, salt, rice, honey, and sugar, were placed in plastic containers. The containers were sealed and placed into well-dug mountain depots, which were subsequently covered. The storage places were usually close to a tree that could be marked to be easily recognized. The two men also spent time marking paths and trails.³¹

▪

Sometime around late August 1970, Sama'i met with Iraj Nayyeri in Rasht, and informed him that he was returning to Tehran. At this time, Sama'i introduced Iraj Nayyeri to Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi. Both were from Lahijan and already knew one another. Sama'i informed Nayyeri that Rahimi-Meschi was now responsible for or in charge of Gilan. A few days later, Sama'i joined the six-

man team under Safa'i-Farahani's command, the same team that would later attack the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station.³²

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Rahimi-Meschi, a member of Hasanpour's Lahijan circle, had left his teaching post near Reza'iyeh around April/May 1969 and had gone back to Lahijan with two Brno guns.³³

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It was at this time that Rahimi-Meschi switched from the urban team to the mountain team. It was probably in September 1969, concurrent with Iraj Nayyeri's post at Shabkhoslat (Shaqouzlat), that Rahimi-Meschi started teaching at a school in Fouman, some sixty kilometres west of Siyahkal. After Sama'i's departure, Rahimi-Meschi and Iraj Nayyeri carried out three more expeditions to Kakouh, dug depots, and stored cans of tuna fish and rice in marked spots.³⁴

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Probably around spring and summer of 1970, Sama'i was carrying out a series of parallel expeditions with Nayyeri and Rahimi-Meschi, building several storage depots in the mountainous areas of Kakouh.³⁵

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Within twenty-one months (September 1968–June 1970), the new leadership had succeeded in creating a focused, well-concealed, almost airtight group of “22 men, committed to armed struggle”. The Group had also “begun preparing for armed struggle”.³⁶

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Its members, however, were still leading semi-clandestine lives. Their amphibious life was conducted on two distinct levels. On one level, they were preparing a rebellion against the state and its laws, while on another level, they led normal lives as law-abiding citizens, serving in the army when called upon for military service, or else working or attending universities.

At the end of January 1970, when Safa'i-Farahani returned to Iran for the first time, the Group was ready to take a leap.³⁷

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He arrived at a time when the Group seemed prepared for military operations. In

Tehran, Safa'i-Farahani stayed at the house of his old friend Houshang Delkhah, who was a member of the urban team. Safa'i-Farahani met with the team leaders and a few members of the urban and mountain teams. During his two-week stay in Tehran, Safa'i-Farahani met with Hasanpour, Ashraf, Fazeli, Dalil-Safa'i, Sadeqinejad, and Same'. They discussed the capabilities and level of preparedness of the Group. Safa'i-Farahani also received a letter from Jazani from prison, the content of which is unknown.³⁸

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During the nineteen-months that Safa'i-Farahani had been away, he had become a seasoned PLO freedom fighter. He had reportedly risen to the rank of the commander of Fatah's Northern Front. Now Safa'i-Farahani had returned to "regroup and re-organize the old comrades and forge a rural movement". To his surprise, he found a "well-prepared group who possessed many of the characteristics that he was looking to operationalize his plan".³⁹

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In contrast to the insecure, exposed, and fragile condition of his group back in June 1968, Safa'i-Farahani found a somewhat solid, well-organized, and confident band of comrades. The promising conditions in Iran induced him to go back to his base in Jordan and return with arms and ammunition.⁴⁰

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Around June 1970, Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani returned to Iran with a considerable cache of smuggled arms. They brought with them five revolvers, two machine guns, twelve grenades, bullets, and dynamite.⁴¹

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All seemed to be in place for launching the armed struggle. With the return of the two PLO veterans, the team grew to twenty-four. In the few months between the arrival of Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani in June 1970, and the assault on Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station in February 1971, three urban operations were carried out. The Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi (P-A-M) Group carried out two of those operations, and what had become the Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa'i-Farahani (H-A-S) Group conducted the third one. In none of these three operations did the revolutionaries divulge their identities, or make it known that their actions were politically motivated. Both groups managed to remain under SAVAK's radar. For some two years, SAVAK was completely unaware that two distinct Marxist revolutionary organizations with the objective of conducting

armed struggle against the Shah's regime were recruiting and growing under its nose. These two groups would later merge and become known as the People's Fada'i Guerrillas.

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The first urban operations of the H-A-S Group

Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani returned to Iran to find a newly organized group very different from the original Jazani Group in age, education, political background, and experience, and, most importantly, in determination to conduct the armed struggle. Their objective, according to Ashraf, was "simply and purely to foster armed clashes and strike at the enemy to shatter the repressive atmosphere in Iran, and to demonstrate that the only way of struggle was that of armed struggle".⁴²

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By 1970, the new group was not interested in political modes of struggle. This clear objective and method translated into greater efficiency in terms of conducting operations. The leadership of the new group was intent on forming professional guerrillas.

The planning and execution of the 1970 operation distinguished it from the previous three attempts made by the remnants of the Jazani Group in spring 1968. From the scant information available, the 1970 operation was better prepared, more focused and, overall, more successful. It also demonstrated greater resolve and firmness in the mindset of the participants. Whereas the 1968 operations had been marred by unpreparedness, and amateurishness, the 1970 operation, carried out by the H-A-S Group, reflected more professionalism.

Sometime in late June or early July 1970, Safa'i-Farahani, Ashraf, and Hasanpour decided to launch urban and mountain armed operations simultaneously.⁴³

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To finance their future operations, the new group had decided to expropriate a bank, to secure funds, and also to test the Group's readiness.⁴⁴

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In the very early afternoon of a day in mid-August 1970, the Vozara Street branch of the Melli Bank was attacked.⁴⁵

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Ashraf and Fazeli had chosen the target.

The operation was carried out in three stages, namely reconnaissance and observation, logistical groundwork, and finally execution. First, the bank and its geographical location had been thoroughly surveyed. Peak and lull hours of customer visits had been charted, and the traffic on Vozara Street had been assessed. The presence and frequency of security guards had been monitored. Second, Fazeli had instructed two recruits, Esmā'il Mo'ini-'Araqi and Sho'a'ollah Moshayyedi, to steal two licence plates, as well as a car in which the team was to make its getaway. Mo'ini-'Araqi and Moshayyedi, members of Hasanpour's first network at Tehran's Polytechnic University, were both electrical engineers employed at the Ministry of Water and Electricity. They had been in touch with Fazeli, working on building a transmitter for the Group.

The licence plates were stolen as planned and handed over to Fazeli. Then Mo'ini-'Araqi stole a white Peykan (an Iranian version of the British Hillman Hunter), which he also passed on to Fazeli. The assault team, disguised as hippies, was composed of the two PLO veterans, Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani, along with Ashraf and Sadeqinejad. The four were driven to the bank in the white Peykan by Mo'ini-'Araqi. The armed guerrillas subdued the bank manager, the bank employees, and the clients, and robbed the bank without any resistance. They netted some 160,000 to 169,000 tomans, and the team returned safely to its base.⁴⁶

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There is mention of another operation by the Jazani Group in The Jazani-Zarifi Group, the Vanguard of Iran's Armed Movement. We now know that Jazani wrote this work. It reported that around mid-October 1970, Saffari-Ashtiyani, Mo'ini-'Araqi, Dalil-Safa'i, and Moshayyedi had attacked the Forsat Street branch of Iran-va-Ingilis Bank and walked away with 360,000 tomans.⁴⁷

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In Hamid Ashraf's two first-hand reports on the Group's activities, however, there is no reference to the operation at Iran-va-Ingilis Bank.⁴⁸

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The veracity of this claim cannot be verified.

Notes

[1](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 120. Kalantari's interrogation reports.

[2](#)

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Kianzad thinks that Moshiri's real name was Ahmadi or Ahmadipour. Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[3](#)

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Same', personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris; Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016.

[4](#)

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Same', personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris. The general information on Moshiri is based on Same'.

[5](#)

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Kianzad, personal interview, 6 January 2016, Cologne; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 120–121. Kalantari’s interrogation reports.

[6](#)

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Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris.

[7](#)

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H. Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, Sazemanha-ye jebheh-ye melli-ye kharej az keshvar, chap-e dovom, Ordibehesht 1353, pp. 2–3. Ashraf does not name the three.

[8](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 172. Hasanpour’s interrogation reports.

[9](#)

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Mehdi Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris.

[10](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 3. The

emphases are mine.

[11](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 6–7.

[12](#)

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Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris.

[13](#)

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Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015. Paris; ‘Abdi, pp. 38, 40, 115.

[14](#)

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Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris.

[15](#)

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Same‘, personal interview, 12 January 2016, Paris.

[16](#)

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Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, 12 January 2016, Paris.

[17](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 139, 895; Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris. Same‘ remembered only two teams, urban and mountain, which concurs with the organizational changes which occur around April 1969.

[18](#)

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Information in the previous two paragraphs is based on Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015; Kianzad, personal correspondence, 30 May 2016; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 895; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 172.

[19](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 139, 895.

[20](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 145–146.

[21](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 3.

[22](#)

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P. (wishes to remain anonymous), personal interview, 28 July 2015, Tehran.

[23](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 139.

[24](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 143.

[25](#)

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Same⁶, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris.

[26](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 3; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 143–144.

[27](#)

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Fasnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 172; Same‘, personal interview, 29 August 2015, Paris; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 894–895.

[28](#)

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Iraj Nayyeri, Akhbare-rooz, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=78191>

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(retrieved 27 January 2019). The correct year of Nayyeri’s meeting with Hasanpour and the commencement of his work at the school near Siyahkal is 1348 (1969) not 1347 (1968). Nayyeri corrects this in <https://bepish.org/node/1695>

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(retrieved 23 February 2019). Verification of the correct date with Nayyeri, courtesy of Farhad Nomani, 25 February 2019.

[29](#)

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Iraj Nayyeri, Akhbare-rooz, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=78191>

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(retrieved 27 January 2019); *Fasnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 264. Iraj Nayyeri’s interrogation reports; Iraj Nayyeri, 15 February 2019, https://bepish.org/node/1695*

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(retrieved 23 February 2019).

[30](#)

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Iraj Nayyeri, 15 February 2019, <https://bepish.org/node/1695>

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(retrieved 23 February 2019).

[31](#)

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Iraj Nayyeri, Akhbare-rooz, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=78191>

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(retrieved 27 January 2019); Iraj Nayeri, 15 February 2019, <https://bepish.org/node/1695>

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(retrieved 23 February 2019).

[32](#)

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Iraj Nayyeri, Akhbare-rooz; Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 264. Iraj Nayyeri's interrogation reports.

[33](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 144.

[34](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 259–260. Iraj Nayyeri's interrogation reports.

[35](#)

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Iraj Nayyeri, Akhbare-rooz, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=78191>

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(retrieved 27 January 2019).

[36](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 3, 27.

[37](#)

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The approximate time of return is deduced from accounts by Same', personal interview, 12 January 2016, Paris.

[38](#)

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Same', personal interview, 12 January 2016, Paris; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 150.

[39](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 3–4;
Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 8–9.

[40](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 4.

[41](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 152; Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va
kouh, pp. 4–5; Rowhani, p. 410.

[42](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 2.

[43](#)

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Keyhan, 15 Farvardin 1350; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 153, 899, 901.

[44](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 5. The term “expropriate” rather than rob or steal is used as the guerrillas believed that they were taking back what originally belonged to the people.

[45](#)

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Ettela‘at, 15 Farvardin, 1350.

[46](#)

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Ettela‘at, 15, 16 Farvardin 1350; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 153–154; Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 5.

[47](#)

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Gorouh-e Jazani-Zarifi, p. 35.

[48](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 5 and Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 8. There was an operation at Iran-va-Ingilis Bank, but it was carried out on 14 July 1969 by Syrus Nahavandi’s organization, Sazeman-e azadibakhsh-e khalqha-ye Iran, at the Takht-e Jamshid branch. See Hasanpour, p. 164.

The Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi Group

From the late 1960s, a growing number of Marxist–Leninist university students sought out like-minded peers to form subversive circles and groups. In this process, different political circles committed to the overthrow of the regime crossed paths. At this time, two key groups of young revolutionaries were pursuing independent and parallel paths of consolidation and expansion. Old remnants of the Jazani Group had morphed into a new group, sometimes designated as the Jungle Group. From here on, this group led by Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa’i-Farahani will be called by their names (H-A-S). Another group of Marxist revolutionary intellectuals, known as the Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi (P-A-M) Group, had also entered the Iranian political scene in the mid-sixties. Individual members of the two groups later reconnected, and the two groups subsequently entered into a theoretical and logistical discussion before finally joining forces to mount the Siyahkal strike.

The political experience, history, and evolution of the two groups were different. Even though the H-A-S Group was freshly reconstituted, it still carried some old baggage in terms of ideas, references, and authority figures, both inside and outside prison. The new recruits may have never heard of Jazani, as was the case with Iraj Nayyeri. However, a few senior figures of the H-A-S Group had known and worked with him, and with other imprisoned members of the Group. The P-A-M Group, in contrast, had no historical antecedents, no old blood, no towering authorities, and no past connection with the Tudeh Party. It was composed of members eager to move from revolutionary talk to revolutionary action. P-A-M members were a rather homogeneous bunch of young university students

(around twenty-five years old), who had assembled around common convictions and objectives. They had studied different options to attain their objective and had articulated their findings in two treatises before entering action. The merger between the two groups and its consequences necessitates understanding the formation and evolution of the P-A-M Group.

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The dissimilar but inseparable Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh

By the time Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi gradually joined forces in around 1967 and 1968, each of the founding members had, to different extents, spun a web of sympathizers and friends around themselves. Their political partnership was based on friendship, mutual trust, and a common understanding of sociopolitical problems and their solutions. Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh shared common experiences dating back to their teenage years, as well as a Mosaddeqist and a modernist Islamic background. From around 1959, the two had regularly attended Mohammad-Taqi Shari‘ati’s Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths, the bastion of progressive Islam. There, they had befriended ‘Ali Shari‘ati, with whom they fell afoul later when they became Marxists. Shari‘ati continued to hold on to his progressive revolutionary Islam.

In his high school years, Pouyan was known for his humour, congeniality, and sociability, while Ahmadzadeh was considered serious, reserved, and bookish. Pouyan loved to mingle with people, Ahmadzadeh was not at ease with crowds and socializing. Pouyan demonstrated a budding talent for literature and impressed his elders with his literary flair. Ahmadzadeh was an excellent student in mathematics and a talented chess player. And yet, this seemingly unlike pair were inseparable.¹

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When Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh moved from Mashhad to attend Tehran University in September 1965, they were both political discontents with strong

Mosaddeqist proclivities. They had both been supporters of the June 1963 uprising led by Ayatollah Khomeyni.²

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At the time, Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh could best be characterized as radical socialist Mosaddeqist Muslims, not so different from their old friend 'Ali Shari'ati.

'Ali Tolou' was a close friend and classmate of Pouyan at Fiyouzat high school in Mashhad. Tolou' had also regularly attended the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths, and subsequently befriended Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mas'oud's father, Taher Ahmadzadeh, a staunch Mosaddeqist, was a very close friend of Mohammad-Taqi Shari'ati and one of the main pillars of the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths. Tolou' skipped a grade, graduated early, and entered the prestigious Engineering Faculty of Tehran University in September 1963.

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Enter 'Abbas Meftahi

On the first day of class at university, the seventeen-year-old Tolou' sat next to another new and academically outstanding entrant, 'Abbas Meftahi. Meftahi came from Sari in Mazandaran and was a year older than Tolou'. Meftahi was also a Mosaddeqist with religious tendencies. Through their discussions and conversations, the two quickly connected and became close friends. The fact that they both admired Mosaddeq drew them closer. But it was their incessant existential and philosophical discussions revolving around faith, God, ideology, Marxism, the Tudeh Party, literature, and poetry that cemented their relationship.

Tolou' was a child of Khorasan, the cradle of Persian literature. However, it was his Mazandarani friend who introduced him to the iconic modern poets of Iran such as Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, a Khorasani, and Ahmad Shamlou and Forough

Farrokhzad, two Tehranis. At this time, Meftahi had some background in Marxism, and within a year, he had initiated Tolou' to it.³

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Back in the summer of 1960, on the rooftop of one of his classmates, Meftahi had accidentally come across a trove of Marxist literature, including works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, as well as old Tudeh Party publications. After this curious exposure, Meftahi had become “enthralled with Marxist ideas” at the age of fifteen.⁴

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During the academic year 1964–1965, Pouyan travelled to Tehran regularly to spend time with his old friend Tolou'. On one of these visits, Tolou' introduced Pouyan to Meftahi. Once Pouyan and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh entered Tehran University in September 1965, Pouyan and Meftahi became close friends. Ahmadzadeh, however, was in his world of mathematics and his relationship with Meftahi remained aloof until later. It was not until 1966 that Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh began their Marxist studies. Meftahi's intellectual relationship with Pouyan, and his enthusiasm for Marxism, induced Pouyan to study Marxist literature. Pouyan's interest in such studies, in turn, intrigued Ahmadzadeh to become interested in Marxism.

Pouyan began studying Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, while Ahmadzadeh engaged with Isaac Deutscher's biographies and, most importantly, Engels's Anti-Dühring. By 1967, under the influence of 'Abbas Meftahi, Pouyan became a Marxist, and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh followed suit shortly afterward.⁵

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Ahmadzadeh's decision to translate Engels's Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, and his study of Engels' Anti-Dühring, played a key role in his eventual conversion to Marxism.⁶

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Ahmadzadeh maintained that it was through his discussions with Pouyan that he moved towards Marxism.⁷

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Somewhere between 1967 and 1968, the old friendship between Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh on the one hand, and the ideological camaraderie between Pouyan

and Meftahi morphed into a revolutionary political group intent on overthrowing the regime.⁸

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It was first 'Abbas Meftahi who began clandestine activities, followed by Pouyan and then Ahmadzadeh.⁹

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So when Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi came together, they merged their respective circles. Members of each circle, located in different geographical areas, became connected and interlaced. Members in one branch or network did not necessarily know members of other branches or networks unless they happened to work together in a team. By 1970 the P-A-M Group could claim the impressive number of at least sixty-six adherents.

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Pouyan's circles at Mashhad and Tabriz

Thanks to his charisma, affable character, and strong organizational and public relations skills, Pouyan succeeded in setting up numerous networks. According to Meftahi, Pouyan had become a magnet, attracting many to himself.¹⁰

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Pouyan was born in Tehran and raised in Mashhad from the age of four. By September 1968, he had a relatively large network of like-minded friends and sympathizers in Mashhad. The key members of the Mashhad branch were Hamid Tavakoli, Bahman Ajang, Gholamreza Galavi, Shahin Tavakoli, and Sa'id Ariyan.

Back in 1963, while studying at Darolfonoun high school in Tehran, Bahman Ajang was part of an anti-regime, left student circle composed of Hamid Ashraf, Farrokh Negahdar, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, and Houshang 'Azimi. All of

them later became involved with the Fada'i guerrillas.¹¹

▪

It is not clear when Ajang became a Marxist, even though it has been suggested that he was initiated to Marxism in ninth grade when he entered Darolfonoun. Ajang entered Mashhad University to study English Language and Literature. He probably met Hamid Tavakoli during the academic year of 1967–1968 and introduced him to Marxism.¹²

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During the academic year 1967–1968, Pouyan, who regularly travelled to Mashhad, met Tavakoli and provided him with Marxist literature. Sometime around the end of the academic year 1967–1968, Hamid Tavakoli put Pouyan in contact with his Marxist circle, composed of Shahin, his sister; Sa'id Ariyan, his brother-in-law; Ajang; and Galavi.¹³

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Later on, Mohammad-Taqi Seyyed-Ahmadi, Mehdi Sovalouni, Hoseyn Seyyed-Nowzadi, and Mohammad-'Ali Salemi joined the Mashhad branch. In 1969, Pouyan introduced Tavakoli to his friend Mohammad-Taqi Seyyed-Ahmadi to study Marxism with him.¹⁴

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Pouyan had travelled to Tabriz several times where he had met with Samad Behrangi, seven years his senior. According to 'Ali Tolou', during the academic year 1966–1967, Pouyan had spoken to him about his contacts with Samad Behrangi and Behrooz Dehqani.¹⁵

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Samad Behrangi had started teaching at the age of eighteen and had eleven years of experience in Azarbayjan's rural primary schools. During his short life (twenty-nine years), Behrangi proved to be a devoted teacher, an exceptionally talented pedagogue, and a social critic, as well as a promising fiction and folklore writer. Behrangi believed in education for critical consciousness. He taught the oppressed to liberate themselves through rereading the world around them. As such, he was Iran's Paulo Freire, but unfortunately, he did not live to the age of seventy-six.

In 1965, Behrangi published his classic criticism of teaching rural and non-Farsi

speaking Iranian schoolchildren, *Inquiry into Educational Problems in Iran* (Kandokav dar masa'el-e tarbiyati-e Iran). However, it was primarily Behrangi's children's stories with the recurrent themes of inequality, poverty, violence, class discrimination, oppression, stifling rural traditions, and discrimination which brought him into the limelight. Behrangi had a way with words that appealed to socially conscious intellectuals. His works touched and moved readers.

By 1966, Pouyan had crossed paths with Behrangi in Tehran and the two had not only become acquainted but had probably spoken subversive politics. Before Behrangi's death, Pouyan had travelled to Tabriz several times to meet and exchange ideas with him.¹⁶

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Their literary penchant and radical politics must have played an important role in bringing them together. Pouyan also ran into the circle of young local literati around Behrangi. Pouyan had published some of his writings and literary criticisms in Ahmad Shamlou's periodical *Khousheh*, where 'Ali-Reza Nabdell and 'Abdol-Manaf Falaki, the literary figures around Behrangi, published their works.¹⁷

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Pouyan knew of Behrangi's close associates in Tabriz; they too were informed about Behrangi's relation with Pouyan.

Behrangi was a staunch anti-regime dissident, if not a revolutionary, who believed that action was needed to overthrow the despotic regime and improve the condition of the masses. In Behrangi's classic and subversive works seemingly for children, such as *The Little Black Fish* and *24 Hours between Sleep and Awakening*, the heroes are battling against oppression and injustice. His leading characters are either armed with a weapon and ready to meet the repressive foe or they dream of coming into possession of a toy machine gun.

In *The Little Black Fish*, Behrangi's most famous work, the defiant young black fish is warned against the pelican, the predator or the fish-eating bird who hunts any fish that dares to go to the surface of the river. The rebel leaves behind the school of fish and goes to the surface, thinking to himself that "Death can creep on me very quickly right now. However, I should not seek it as long as I can live. If ultimately, I come face to face with it – which I will – it will not matter. What will matter is the effect my life and death will have on others."¹⁸

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Behrangi's words came to resonate in the minds of many revolutionaries who embraced armed struggle. They knew that in Behrangi's story, the little black fish became trapped in the long, deadly beak of the fish-eating bird, while it was contemplating life, death, and social responsibility. Behrangi's story ends with the little black fish killing the predator and "going missing" in the process. The daring story of the little black fish searching for freedom is told and retold among the school of fish in the river. The cause and vision of resistance for freedom is picked up by a little "red fish".

After the untimely death of Samad Behrangi by drowning on 31 August 1968, Pouyan sought to re-establish contact with Behrangi's close comrades in Tabriz. From his conversations with Behrangi, he must have known that a committed core of revolutionaries existed in Tabriz. Pouyan was intent on meeting and initiating a dialogue with them. In early April 1969, Pouyan along with 'Abbas-'Ali Houshmand visited Tabriz.¹⁹

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Without any concrete information or leads on the identity of Behrangi's circle of friends, the two eventually managed to meet with Behrooz Dehqani, 'Ali-Reza Nabdell, Kazem Sa'adati, and Behrooz Dowlatabadi at Dehqani's house. According to Behrooz Dowlatabadi, it was at this meeting that Pouyan and Behrangi's close circle of friends decided to pool their efforts and combine forces, giving birth to the Tabriz branch.²⁰

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The Tabriz branch was initially composed of Behrangi's closest comrades, Behrooz Dehqani, Kazem Sa'adati, 'Ali-Reza Nabdell, and 'Abdol-Manaf Falaki. Behrangi's friends were all marked by his critical social consciousness, his desire to improve the lot of the rural people, and his subversive literary flair. Behrangi, Dehqani, and Sa'adati had been inseparable. They had first studied at Tabriz's Teacher Training College and had then pursued studies at Tabriz University. The three became bosom buddies around 1962 while teaching in the same rural school at Azarshahr. In September 1965, along with Qolam-Hoseyn Farnoud and Rahim Ra'is-Dana, they published a weekly called The Special Friday Issue of the Cradle of Freedom (Mahd-e azadi, vijeh-e adineh). Behrangi, Dehqani, Nabdell, and Falaki were regular contributors to this weekly which was closed after almost a year.²¹

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Nabdel went on to study Law at Tehran University and returned to Tabriz to become a teacher. In the academic year 1965–1966, Nabdel supplied his friends in Tabriz with the political leaflets and announcements that circulated at Tehran University. Falaki, on the other hand, was a carpet weaver in Tabriz, who had managed to obtain his high school diploma and enter university. It is said that it was Behrangi who first discovered Falaki's literary talent.²²

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Parallel to this branch of pedagogues and literary revolutionaries, Asadollah Meftahi began contacting like-minded radical students. Asadollah was 'Abbas Meftahi's younger brother who studied medicine at Tabriz University. The circle around Asadollah Meftahi, which grew into a network, took shape during the academic year 1968–1969. The members initially studied Marxist–Leninist literature such as *The Communist Manifesto* and *What Is to be Done?*, but it was not until the summer of 1970 that Asadollah Meftahi's network adopted armed struggle as the objective of the Group.²³

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'Abbas Meftahi, who was aware of his brother's political activities, had put him and his circle of friends at Tabriz University in contact with Behrooz Dehqani and his group.²⁴

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Asadollah Meftahi's Tabriz University circle grew over time and included Mohammad-Taqi Afshani-Naqadeh, Javad Rahimzadeh-Oskou'i, 'Ali-Asghar Izadi, Hasan Ja'fari, Yahya Aminnia, and 'Ali Tavasoli.²⁵

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From April 1969, the Tabriz branch expanded as the founding members of each circle admitted their sympathizers into the Group. Falaki gradually recruited Ahmad Riyazi, Rahim Kiyavar, and Roqiyeh Daneshgary (October 1970), while Afshani-Naqadeh recruited Akbar Mo'ayyed.²⁶

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After both circles in Tabriz were consolidated under the leadership of Dehqani, Nabdel, Falaki, and Sa'adati, the branch became integrated into the P-A-M Group.

Probably between fall 1969 and fall 1970, in tandem with their recruitment

drive, the key players of the Tabriz branch produced an impressive quantity of research. The Tabriz branch was curious to understand the socio-economic formation of rural Azarbayjan. Nabdell, Dehqani, Falaki, and Afshani-Naqadeh wrote several monographs for members of the P-A-M Group. Some of the writings by Dehqani, Nabdell, and Afshani-Naqadeh were the result of their independent research on the socio-economic conditions of various rural areas, primarily around Reza'iyeh. Falaki wrote a pamphlet on carpet weaving and the working conditions of carpet weavers in Azarbayjan. Nabdell wrote "Which Worker to Meet, How and Where" (spring 1970) and "Azarbayjan and the National Question". Dehqani wrote a historical manuscript on the Azarbayjani Democratic Party and the 1945 movement in Iran.²⁷

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Ahmadzadeh's membership in Hirmanpour's circle

In Tehran, each founding member had one or more respective circles of friends and sympathizers. The character and peculiarity of each founding member corresponded with the temperament of the circles they created or entered. Pouyan and Meftahi assiduously pursued suitable political recruits and cultivated study groups and circles. Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, on the other hand, uninterested in the socializing involved in forming groups, joined an already existing Marxist political circle.

The founder of this theoretically sophisticated, and vibrant Marxist revolutionary circle was Bijan Hirmanpour. Sometime between January and March 1968, Ahmadzadeh had met this new group through a bookish classmate called Martik Qazariyan, a mathematics major at Tehran University's Faculty of Science. Qazariyan was associated with this circle which had gradually taken shape around Bijan Hirmanpour during the academic year 1965–1966.²⁸

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The members of Hirmanpour's study group had initially included Parviz Zahedi,

Manouchehr Brahman, Behrooz Hadi Zonouz, Pourandokht Mastani-Gorgani, Jalal Naqqash, and Martik Qazariyan. ‘Abdolkarim Hajiyan-Sehpoleh joined the group in September 1969 and shared a house with Hirmanpour at Shahrara. They were both from Esfahan, and Hajiyan-Sehpoleh was a classmate of Hirmanpour’s brother. According to Hirmanpour, Ahmad Farhoudi, a member of ‘Abbas Meftahi’s Sari group, was also a member of his group.²⁹

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Hirmanpour was born in Esfahan in 1943 and when he entered Tehran University he was interested in political science. He was not a typical university student. He had written his first poem when he was thirteen and had studied music with Mohammad-‘Ali Baharlou, the renowned Iranian violinist, when he was eighteen. Before entering university, he was familiar with the works of Forough Farrokhzad and Sadeq Hedayat and fervently read the intellectual periodicals of the time, like Negin, Jahan-e No, and Ferdowsi. Hirmanpour was a mature twenty-two-year-old who made friends with a group of students at Tehran University’s Faculty of Economics and quickly organized a study group.

In this group, members studied works by Marx and Engels, as well as Arnold Toynbee and Will Durant. The group soon focused on Marxist, Leninist, and New Left literature and came to consider itself as a Marxist circle. Hirmanpour had a sound knowledge of English, enabling him to study Marxist works published at the time by Progress, Penguin, Pelican, Monthly Review Press, and New Left Books. In the mid-1960s, books which would later be considered subversive and illegal were available in Tehran, and were sold at Gutenberg, Jahan, and Sako bookstores.³⁰

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Hirmanpour was well read in classical Marxism, as well as in the abundant New Left literature published in the mid-1960s. In 1961, while still in Esfahan, Hirmanpour had already read a Farsi translation of The Communist Manifesto, and Ahmad Qasemi’s classic book called Sociology. This was a Tudeh Party publication on Marxist ideology, class struggle, social polarization, and discrimination. Hirmanpour had also read Georgi Plekhanov’s The Role of the Individual in History. In Tehran, Hirmanpour’s small, yet impressive, Marxist library included, among other works, Marx’s Capital (three volumes), Surplus Value (three volumes), and The Civil War in France; Marx and Engels’s Selected Works (three volumes); Engels’s Dialectics of Nature and The Peasant War in Germany; Lenin’s Collected Works (forty-five volumes); and Anatoly

Vasilievich Lunacharsky's On Literature and Art.

Hirmanpour obtained his classic Marxist books from Sako bookstore, on Stalin Street, in the Armenian and Zoroastrian neighbourhood of Tehran. Sako bookstore, founded by Sako Hovsepiyan, imported books of different kinds and languages. Sako was a popular hang-out among politicized intellectuals seeking Marxist books translated into English and published by the Moscow-based Progress Publishers.

Hirmanpour, whose eyesight had gradually failed him, conducted his studies with the assistance of friends and comrades. In the academic year 1967–1968, along with Manouchehr Brahman who was proficient in English, Hirmanpour began studying Marx's three volumes of Capital. With Martik Qazariyan, Hirmanpour read Engels's Dialectics of Nature. Hirmanpour and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh tackled Engels's The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. They succeeded in translating a third of the book and decided to omit parts of the first three chapters, which dealt with Lewis Morgan's analysis of ancient society.

Almost parallel with their ideological studies, the group began researching Iran's socio-economic condition. They drew upon the research generated at Tehran University's Institute of Social Studies and Research and official government statistics and surveys. Hirmanpour recalled that Naser Pakdaman's informative classes on land reform at Tehran University gave the group a sociohistorical perspective and frame of reference.

To gain first-hand information on rural socio-economic conditions, Hirmanpour's Marxist circle spent some four years conducting its own independent field research. Curious and interested provincial students, associated with the group, spent their summers studying the socio-economic conditions of their own regions.³¹

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Hirmanpour was effectively running an amateur, yet impressive, non-governmental think tank in the late 1960s. The findings of his research and policy "institute" resulted in viewing armed struggle as an appropriate political strategy. Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh was the conduit transmitting the important findings of Hirmanpour's group to the members of the Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi Group.

For thirty-two months (January 1968 to September 1970), Hirmanpour and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh met at least once a week and enjoyed a deep personal and political relationship. Ahmadzadeh found in Hirmanpour a theoretically learned comrade. Hirmanpour's knowledge of Marxism and the socio-economic conditions in Iran satisfied Ahmadzadeh's thirst for getting to the bottom of Iran's political deadlock. Neither Pouyan nor Meftahi were equipped with Hirmanpour's theoretical tools. Neither could provide Ahmadzadeh with the hard facts and detailed analysis like Hirmanpour could.

From around September 1968, and at the behest of Ahmadzadeh, the Group produced three issues of an internal underground publication. The typewritten articles stapled into a samizdat were primarily the works of Ahmadzadeh and Hirmanpour. Ahmadzadeh's articles were on the analysis and critique of Soviet revisionism and Khrushchev's reconciliatory position in relation to capitalist and imperialist countries. Hirmanpour's articles included a translation of Lin Piao's "Long Live Leninism" and a critique of Mostafa Rahimi's article on the Prague Spring. Hirmanpour deplored Rahimi's attack on communism. There was also a literary critique of Jalal Al-e Ahmad, which was probably Pouyan's and submitted by Ahmadzadeh. The cover page of the first issue, designed by Ahmadzadeh, was the drawing of a gun.³²

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Ahmadzadeh's association had a transformative effect on Hirmanpour's circle of friends. As some left, Hirmanpour's academically inclined Marxist study circle evolved into a political group aimed at launching an anti-regime movement. An internal discussion was initiated to arrive at the correct method of struggle, given the socio-economic realities in Iran. Around October 1968, Ahmadzadeh, with the help of Ajang, had completed translating Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* This Farsi translation provided the potential revolutionaries with an account of how the Cubans won their revolution. Copies of it were made available to members of Hirmanpour's group, as well as to the key members of Pouyan's Mashhad branch, to help with internal group discussions. It is highly probable that it was also passed on to the Tabriz branch.

By March/April 1970, Hirmanpour's group had a clear vision of how to pursue its political objectives. They concluded that the revolutionary movement necessitated armed struggle. However, it was unrealistic to establish fixed rural guerrilla bases evolving into liberated areas and eventually surrounding the cities from the countryside. They decided that armed struggle needed to rely on highly

mobile guerrilla forces, and peasants were unreliable recruits due to land reform. The movement, therefore, had to be launched through urban guerrilla operations. They decided that the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban models of revolutions were not suitable for Iran. By June 1970, members had aired all arguments and counterarguments around the subject. Finally, all members were asked to sum up their analysis on the suitable strategy, tactics, and organizational structure of the armed struggle movement.³³

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Ahmadzadeh's famous pamphlet *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic* was the outcome of this group exercise. Ahmadzadeh took refuge at Jalal Naqqash's house for about a month, during which he wrote and typed his report. Around August 1970, through Hajiyan-Sehpoleh, Ahmadzadeh sent his long report to Hirmanpour for comments. Hirmanpour (alias Kaveh) commented on the piece and sent it back to Ahmadzadeh, who had gone clandestine around September 1970. In November 1970, Ahmadzadeh made his way to Hirmanpour's home to discuss the report. Hirmanpour was primarily concerned with Ahmadzadeh's non-orthodox Marxist analysis. Referring to Ahmadzadeh's controversial statement, questioning the belief that rebellion (qiyam) had to be the people's doing, Hirmanpour worried that Ahmadzadeh's work would be branded as revisionist. The two agreed that Hirmanpour's concerns should be addressed in the text. The November meeting was the last time that the two met. Hirmanpour was arrested on 19 January 1971.³⁴

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His arrest took place after Jalal Naqqash was taken into custody for his involvement in a student strike.

Ahmadzadeh remained true to his promise and demonstrated his reverence towards his comrade. When the final text of *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic* appeared, Ahmadzadeh had added thirteen footnotes to his treatise. These sometimes-lengthy afterthoughts directly reflected Hirmanpour's comments and concerns. Footnote five, for example, tried to mitigate Ahmadzadeh's thunderous statement, "Whoever said insurrection was the job of the people?"³⁵

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Meftahi's Sari and Tehran circles

By the time 'Abbas Meftahi had become a founder of the P-A-M Group, he had already established a network in Sari, Mazandaran. The members of his network, Ahmad Farhoudi, Naqi Hamidiyan, and Rahim Karimiyan, were old school friends. During high school and after graduation in 1963, all three had retained their religious beliefs while remaining profoundly loyal to Mosaddeq and his nationalist cause.³⁶

Meftahi had also been both religious and a supporter of Mosaddeq before he became a Marxist. It is most likely that between the summer of 1960 and 1963, Meftahi was grappling with Islam, nationalism, and Marxism. In 1963, when Meftahi met Tolou', he confided in him that he continued to do his daily prayers, although he had lost faith in God.³⁷

During the academic year 1964–1965, 'Abbas Meftahi resolved his philosophical and political dilemmas by coming out as a Marxist revolutionary. It was also during this academic year that the excellent student turned radical political activist began to slip in his academic pursuits. He failed his second year at Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering.³⁸

In 1965 Farhoudi, Hamidiyan, and Karimiyan had begun their careers as employees of the Ministry of Economy in Sari. Hamidiyan was an accountant, while the other two worked in the tax department. Their exposure to the prevalent corruption made them disgusted with the political and economic system in place. Having read, among other works, Georges Politzer's *Elementary Principles of Philosophy* and Lenin's *What Is to be Done?*, the Meftahi circle in Sari began identifying itself as an anti-Shah, Marxist opposition group. According to Hamidiyan, had it not been for Meftahi's influence, the Sari circle would have neither taken shape nor subsequently become embroiled in revolutionary armed struggle.³⁹

In 1966, the Sari study circle began preparing itself for underground political activities, and sometime around fall 1967 (pa'iz 1346) it was integrated into the group which had already been formed around Pouyan and Meftahi.⁴⁰

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The political networking of Pouyan and Meftahi had been somewhat staggering before the constitution of the P-A-M Group. Each had their own specialized zone of operation. Pouyan frequented the popular intellectual cafés of Tehran such as Naderi, Ferdowsi, and Firouz. At these cafés he crossed paths with literary, intellectual, and artistic figures such as Esma'il Khoe'i, Naser Rahmaninejad, Baqer Parham, and Mohammad Mokhtari.⁴¹

▪

Pouyan collaborated with members of Iran's Writers' Association and frequented the Iran Theatre Circle (Anjoman-e teatr-e Iran). He probably knew Ahmad Shamlou since he wrote for the Khouses literary magazine, and spent long hours discussing politics and guerrilla warfare with Gholam-Hoseyn Sa'edi.⁴²

▪

'Abbas Meftahi did not have Pouyan's literary and artistic connections. During the academic years 1964–1965 and 1965–1966, Meftahi spent most of his time canvassing and recruiting fellow students interested in anti-regime activities. Meftahi, who was as sociable as Pouyan, moved from one university circle to another, contacting and lobbying potential recruits. Meftahi, an avid consumer and charitable dealer of Marxist literature, had established links with booksellers trading in “subversive literature” and procured whatever Marxist literature was available. Before long, Meftahi had become a hub for the distribution of Marxist and revolutionary literature to various university study groups.

In the academic year 1965–1966, Meftahi befriended Kazem Salahi, who had just entered Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering. 'Abbas Meftahi and Kazem Salahi quickly found common political interests. Salahi was already familiar with a few Marxist texts. He was attracted to Marxist ideas and welcomed forming a study group with Meftahi. The two listened, recorded, and transcribed the programmes of the Tudeh Party's Peyk-e Iran Radio broadcast from East Germany and Bulgaria. They also monitored the Farsi programme of Peking Radio and took notes on the contents of its ideological broadcasts.

'Abbas Meftahi introduced Kazem Salahi to Pouyan in the academic year of 1967–1968.⁴³

▪
Around July to September 1967, Pouyan and Meftahi formed a Marxist–Leninist group committed to combatting the Shah’s regime.⁴⁴

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Ahmadzadeh joined the Group shortly afterwards.⁴⁵

▪
Pouyan encouraged Meftahi to recruit his friends and bring them into the Group. Meftahi, in turn, approached Salahi and invited him to join the Group. According to Meftahi, Salahi resisted at first, but after having read a few works by Pouyan, he agreed. It is not clear which of Pouyan’s writings Salahi may have read. Meftahi, however, referred to a three-page handwritten work by Pouyan which described organization and recruitment. This work seems to have disappeared with no trace of it.⁴⁶

▪
In time, Kazem Salahi passed on the Marxist literature he studied with Meftahi to his brother Javad Salahi, who later joined ‘Abbas Meftahi’s Tehran circle.⁴⁷

▪
In fall 1968, Meftahi introduced Kazem Salahi to Ahmad Zibaroum (Zibrom), through the intermediary of Pouyan. It is reported that Zibrom was initially introduced to the Group by Bahman Ajang. Kazem Salahi and Zibrom were to form a study group. Unlike most members of Meftahi’s Tehran group, Zibrom was not a university student, but rather a self-taught revolutionary coming from a working-class background. While studying in high school, Zibrom worked as a fisherman at Bandar-e Anzali to support his family. Having obtained his high school diploma, Zibrom finished his military service and moved to Tehran where he started working at the town hall library. From around October 1968, Kazem Salahi, his brother Javad Salahi, and Ahmad Zibrom formed a three-man circle.⁴⁸

▪
Back in the academic year 1965–1966, ‘Abbas Meftahi had a room-mate called Mas‘oud Akhavan. Through Akhavan, Meftahi met Changiz Qobadi who had entered Tehran University’s Medical School during the academic year 1960–1961. Meftahi and Changiz Qobadi became close friends and formed a study group. Meftahi provided Qobadi and his wife, Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan, also a medical student, with Marxist literature. Changiz Qobadi’s brother,

Bahram, was some three years younger and had entered Tehran University's Medical School in the academic year 1964–1965.

Bahram Qobadi recalled that during the academic year 1965–1966, he would accompany 'Abbas Meftahi to a restaurant called Naz, in front of Tehran University, where they would have a rice dish with sour cherries (albaloupolo). During the same academic year, Bahram Qobadi recalled frequenting the Empire and Radio City cinemas on Pahlavi Street with 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, where they saw Michael Cacoyannis's classic *Zorba the Greek*. At this time, Bahram was neither aware of the political activities of his brother, Changiz, nor of his friends 'Abbas Meftahi, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, and Kazem Salahi. Bahram Qobadi joined his brother's political group in August/September 1969.⁴⁹

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Changiz Qobadi also recruited 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, who in turn enlisted Hasan Sarkari.⁵⁰

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Changiz Qobadi (alias Joachim), Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan (alias Celia), Bahram Qobadi (alias Andre), and 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari (alias Fuchick) gradually became integrated into the P-A-M Group through 'Abbas Meftahi. Bahram Qobadi recalled that when he joined the Group, Changiz Qobadi and his friends had already formed a political group called the New Level Party of the Working Class (Hezb-e taraz-e novin-e tabaqeh karegar). This so-called party had its statutes and focused on studying Marxism, Iran's past and present societies, and organizational structures. Between October and December 1969, Bahram Qobadi wrote a sixty-page pamphlet on "The Socio-Economic Structure of Iran during the Mongol Period". Changiz Qobadi commissioned this study and sent it to the "leadership team" (markaziyat).⁵¹

▪

The political group around Changiz Qobadi underwent radical transformations after Pouyan's treatise in spring 1970, and Ahmadzadeh's treatise in fall 1970. Pouyan's work, referred to as the "Spring Pamphlet" in the Group, did away with the idea of forming a party. The pamphlet made it clear to all that "to prove our existence we needed to act, while an inactive being was in effect nonexistence." In reference to Pouyan's treatise, Bahram Qobadi recalled that it was as though "after the Constitutional Revolution (mashroutiyat) someone had something to say." Finally, the publication of Ahmadzadeh's treatise, known to

the Qobadi Group as the “Fall Pamphlet”, veered them to become “urban guerrillas”. Even though Ahmadzadeh’s treatise made no references to Marighella, it became a portal for members to identify with Marighella.⁵²

▪

In a general environment of suspicion, distrust, and introversion due to SAVAK’s legendary omnipotence, ‘Abbas Meftahi behaved boldly, never shying away from making contact and soliciting recruits. Tehran University and Tehran’s Polytechnic University were the main recruitment grounds for anti-regime revolutionaries in Tehran. Therefore, it was not surprising that Meftahi came across and befriended members of the Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa’i-Farahani (H-A-S) Group, even before the two groups merged in 1971.

Meftahi regularly frequented Tehran’s Polytechnic University, where he had a good number of friends. It was probably during the academic year 1966–1967 that Meftahi came to befriend Ghafour Hasanpour who at the time was busy with his recruitment campaign.⁵³

▪

On a different occasion, during one of his visits to Kamal Bozorgi’s dormitory room at Tehran’s Polytechnic University, probably in the academic year 1965–1966, Meftahi met with Seyf Dalil-Safa’i. Meftahi had known Dalil-Safa’i from their school years at Pahlavi high school in Sari.⁵⁴

▪

A chance encounter in Kamal Bozorgi’s room brought the two closer together, even though at the time Meftahi felt as though Dalil-Safa’i was more interested in his studies than in politics.⁵⁵

▪

Within a year of this meeting, Dalil-Safa’i was recruited by Hasanpour and became an important figure in his network. So, even before the official formation of the P-A-M Group, Meftahi had known Hasanpour and Dalil-Safa’i. Meftahi also knew Safa’i-Farahani, another key player of the H-A-S Group. It was Meftahi’s connections and friendships with key members of the H-A-S Group which laid the foundation of the two groups initiating contacts, entering negotiations, and eventually merging.

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The P-A-M Group's military operations before Siyahkal

By 1970, the P-A-M Group had developed into a considerable force. It had established networks operating in Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Sari. The Group was composed of some sixty-six members if not more.⁵⁶

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By October 1970, when the Group launched into action, Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh had already provided their members and other potential revolutionaries with two essential treatises. These writings provided a covenant, a frame of reference, and a guide to action for the revolutionaries.

The expansion and maintenance of the Group, as well as the need to procure arms and materiel to launch the armed struggle, compelled the Group to plan and execute a bank robbery.⁵⁷

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Towards the end of September 1970, on Meftahi's recommendation, Ahmad Farhoudi went to Tehran.⁵⁸

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Farhoudi had been a key member of the Sari branch. In Tehran, Farhoudi contacted Kazem Salahi, the team leader. The target of the team was the Vanak Street branch of the Melli Bank. In the process of briefing Farhoudi on the objective of their bank operation, Salahi informed him that, "following Marighella and the Tupamaros in Brazil and Guatemala [sic] as well as Latin America in general, we will satisfy our needs by robbing banks."⁵⁹

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The four-man team involved in this operation was composed of Kazem Salahi, the team commander, Ahmad Zibrom, Hamid Tavakoli, and Ahmad Farhoudi. Around September, Tavakoli, a member of the Mashhad branch, and Farhoudi, a member of the Sari branch, converged on Tehran to spend a month together before launching the operation.

In preparation for the bank robbery, the Group decided to purchase a car with a forged identity card. Ahmad Farhoudi obtained a defunct identity card, erased whatever needed to be removed, attached his own picture, forged the stamp, and bought a light blue Peykan for 13,000 tomans. Friends in the Sari branch of the organization helped with the forgery. Having obtained their getaway vehicle, the team began surveying the bank and familiarizing themselves with the streets in the vicinity and the pattern of traffic lights around the bank. They carefully studied the bank's floor plan and reviewed their getaway route.⁶⁰

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Bahram Qobadi, Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan, and her sister Azarnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan were sent to visit the bank, survey it, and report on its activities.⁶¹

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Two nights before the operation, tasks were assigned. Zibrom, armed with a pistol, was to enter the bank, subdue the bank manager and all four bank employees, and obtain the money. Farhoudi, armed with a knife, was assigned to follow Zibrom into the bank and make sure that the bank manager would not open fire on the assailants. Kazem Salahi, the team commander, armed with a pistol, was to be the last person to enter the bank. He was responsible for handing over a bag to Zibrom who was to fill it with money at the counters. Tavakoli was to park the car in front of the bank and stand by while the engine was running. Armed with a pistol, he was to ensure that no one would enter or leave the bank.⁶²

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At 07:00 on Tuesday, 20 October 1970, the four guerrillas left their base. At 10:30, their mission was accomplished with no resistance from either the clients or bank employees. Salahi characterized the operation as done with "utmost tenderness".⁶³

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Farhoudi handed over the monies "expropriated" to Javad Salahi, Kazem Salahi's brother. Some two months after the previous bank attack by the Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa'i-Farahani Group, the P-A-M Group carried out their operation and walked away with some 220,000 to 330,000 tomans.⁶⁴

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The success of the smooth and violence-free operation was marred, however, by an unexpected accident, characteristic of a not-so-professional team of guerrillas. In the getaway car, an inadvertent shot was fired from Kazem Salahi's pistol, wounding the right-hand side of Zibrom's head. The surface wound was not very serious, and Changiz Qobadi, the Group's doctor, managed to treat it.

The accidental shooting jolted all four members. For the first time, the theoretical likelihood of injury and even possible death became a reality for the revolutionary novices. Stunned and destabilized by the misadventure, the subsequent actions of the team became rushed and careless. Without taking any precautions, they quickly abandoned the getaway car. After a couple of days, when the team members returned to recover the car, they discovered that it had vanished. The light blue Peykan had been identified and towed away by the police, enabling SAVAK to trace the car back to Farhoudi.⁶⁵

▪

Once Farhoudi was identified as one of the bank robbers, he went underground for some three months, before joining Safa'i-Farahani's mountain team in late January 1971.

The second operation carried out by the P-A-M Group constituted the first military operation of the Group in the proper sense of the word. The target of the guerrillas was a police station in Tabriz and the idea came from Pouyan. In late December 1970, Pouyan had met with 'Ali-Reza Nabdell in Tehran. Once Nabdell had taken charge of the Tabriz branch, he organized an operational team composed of Behrooz Dehqani, Mohammad-Taqi Afshani-Naqadeh, and Akbar Mo'ayyed.⁶⁶

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The objective of the Tabriz branch was clear and straightforward, to disarm the policeman guarding the police station and expropriate his Uzi machine gun. The Tabriz branch had studied, and subsequently rejected the possibility of attacking Police Stations numbers 3 and 9. The snowy winters in Tabriz made the use of motorbikes impractical on ice-covered slippery streets. The proximity of a police station to the guerrillas' hideout became, therefore, an essential criterion for selecting a target. Behrooz Dehqani proposed Police Station number 5 on Shahnaz Street, close to their safe house, and this was quickly approved.⁶⁷

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At 22:00 on 3 February 1971, a team of four men, armed with three pistols, a few Molotov cocktails, and a hammer, attacked Tabriz's Police Station number 5 on foot.⁶⁸

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All wore knitted woollen balaclavas which rolled down to become full face masks.⁶⁹

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'Abdol-Manaf Falaki led the assault team composed of Ja'far Ardebilchi, Mohammad Taqizadeh-Cheraqi, and Asghar 'Arab-Harisi. The operational team was made up of one member of the leadership team, Falaki, and three junior members. The two senior members Behrooz Dehqani and Taqi Afshani-Naqadeh accompanied the team but stood at a distance from the theatre of engagement. They were responsible for safely transporting the stolen machine gun away from the scene.

The plan was for Taqizadeh-Cheraqi to take hold of the policeman standing outside the station, and for Ardebilchi to knock him unconscious with the hammer and seize his machine gun. Falaki and 'Arab-Harisi were to assure the smooth running of the operation and intervene if need be. When Ardebilchi struck his target, the blow did not knock out the policeman. Yet, Taqizadeh-Cheraqi was able to grab the policeman's machine gun and both assailants took flight. The injured policeman, yelling and shouting, gave chase. Falaki intervened, shooting and injuring the policeman. After this first engagement, the machine gun was safely passed on to Dehqani. As the guerrillas made their getaway, Ardebilchi fell behind and was attacked by another policeman, patrolling the area. Hearing the altercation between the two, Falaki returned to the scene, shot dead the policeman who had overpowered Ardebilchi, and released his comrade. Later that night, the team members returned safely to their hideout, having completed their mission.⁷⁰

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An ethical digression: To press or not to press the trigger

There were lessons to be learnt from the two urban operations conducted by the P-A-M Group in Tehran and Tabriz. Even though both missions had achieved their objectives, there were complications with significant consequences. The flaws and setbacks were partly due to the revolutionaries having had hardly any preparation. The untrained guerrillas were functioning under considerable stress and pressure. They believed that they should act first and learn by doing rather than stalling, mulling over all possibilities and eventualities, or developing detailed backup plans.

Reflecting on the first steps taken by the guerrillas, Hamid Ashraf observed that “this heroic generation, began its work without any practical experience and without any benefit from the experience of past generations.” Ashraf was echoing Ahmadzadeh’s observations and was lamenting the fact that previous generations had failed to leave them with any “creative and useful experiences”, obliging the “young generation” to start their armed endeavour from scratch.⁷¹

▪

The notion of training and learning, while also making revolution, was more complicated in practice than in theory. Not every socially conscious and anti-despotic person was an efficient guerrilla. The transformation into “effective, violent, selective, and cold killing machines” to destroy the enemy, as Guevara described the efficient guerrilla, was clearly not for everyone.⁷²

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Before entering action, there was no telling what the true mettle of each potential revolutionary would be, and how each individual would behave under stress. How could dedicated revolutionaries know their own capabilities and limitations prior to launching into action? How could they predict how they would react in the face of real combat, when they would have to shoot to kill, and how to decompress after an engagement?

Irrespective of the guerrillas’ firm devotion to the cause, mental and physical preparedness, composure, and reaction to violence varied considerably. As the history of the Fada’i guerrillas would later demonstrate, the state of mind and reaction of the revolutionaries in the heat of engagement, under siege, in danger of being arrested, under torture, and in court was quite varied. Different revolutionaries had different degrees of stamina, quick-wittedness,

resourcefulness, resolve, and threshold of pain. The guerrillas were neither trained soldiers nor mercenaries. As Ashraf would describe his comrades, “This is a being who loses all that belongs to him, to obtain everything.”⁷³

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This young generation of combatants were intellectuals voluntarily putting themselves through fire and brimstone for a cause they believed in. Their performance in grave situations was not entirely under their control.

‘Abdol-Manaf Falaki (alias Shirej), the twenty-five-year-old carpet-weaver and poet turned intellectual revolutionary, risked his life on 3 February 1971. The conscientious team leader returned to the scene of engagement to rescue his comrade, and he did not hesitate to shoot at the policeman on patrol who was apprehending his team member. His actions seemed befitting of a professional guerrilla. Ja‘far Ardebilchi (alias Mark) did not or could not strike a strong enough blow to the head of the policeman standing guard to completely knock him out. And although Ardebilchi had been armed, when confronted with the policeman on patrol, he did not or could not shoot him and was therefore subdued. Again, it was up to Falaki to intervene. Had it not been for Falaki, Ardebilchi would have been arrested, injured, or killed. Ardebilchi’s performance demonstrated an apprehension about using violence, even though he had voluntarily chosen to join the armed struggle movement. Yet both young men were equally dedicated revolutionaries.

After their common experience, irrespective of their opposite reactions, the fate of all four members of the operational team turned out to be same. The sour taste of engagement led Falaki and Ardebilchi to reconsider, and even back off. Ardebilchi abandoned the Group, and armed struggle all together, even though he may have continued to believe in the idea of overthrowing the dictatorship through armed struggle. Falaki experienced doubts about armed struggle, but eventually overcame his misgivings. Exactly two months after his first military operation, Falaki joined the team led by Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh and attacked the Qolhak Police Station in Tehran on 3 April 1971. During this attack, Falaki once again shot and killed a policeman.⁷⁴

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After Falaki was arrested on Sunday, 25 July 1971, under torture he divulged his meeting with Ahmadzadeh. One day after Falaki’s arrest, Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh was arrested. In prison, Falaki, the model guerrilla, was accused of treason and

was boycotted by his old comrades. Rejected by his comrades, Falaki was also under constant pressure from SAVAK to go on television and recant. He refused and resisted all pressure to betray his cause. At his trial, Falaki's passionate defence of his cause, his acts as a guerrilla, and his condemnation of the regime, cemented the regime's decision to execute him. In the political environment of the times, the guerrilla was assumed to be a superman and impervious to pain.⁷⁵

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On 12 March 1972, all four participants in the attack on Police Station number 5 in Tabriz, Falaki, Ardebilchi, 'Arab-Harisi, and Taqizadeh-Cheraqi, together with five other members of the Tabriz branch, faced the regime's firing squad.⁷⁶

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The average age of the four at the time of their execution was about twenty-seven.

Notes

[1](#)

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‘Ali Tolou’, personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris; Ne‘mat Mirzazadeh, personal interview, 18 March 2015, Paris; Mastoureh Ahmadzadeh, personal interview, 12 March 1998, Paris.

[2](#)

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Tolou’, personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[3](#)

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Tolou’, personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[4](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 20.

[5](#)

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Tolou’, personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris. According to Hamidiyan, Meftahi claimed that Pouyan was a Marxist before the two met. Hamidiyan, p.

27; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 245.

[6](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 27; Tolou', personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[7](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 247. Ahmadzadeh's interrogation reports.

[8](#)

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Tolou', personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris. Meftahi maintains that Ahmadzadeh was brought into the group after the initial discussions between him and Pouyan. See: *Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi*, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 247–248. Meftahi's interrogation reports. Hamidiyan, p. 28, confirms the contention that Ahmadzadeh was brought into the group later.

[9](#)

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Tolou', personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[10](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 247. 'Abbas Meftahi's

interrogation reports.

[11](#)

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Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

[12](#)

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Farhad Amidi, Asre No, <http://asre-nou.net/php/view.php?objnr=29796>

▪

(retrieved 16 May 2018).

[13](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 291–293.

[14](#)

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19 Bahman-e Theoric, “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi, Pishahang-e jonbesh-e mosallahaneh-e Iran”, no. 7, p. 10. Hereafter: “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”; Hamidiyan, p. 28; Falakhan, no. 110, Mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh daricheh-i be donya-ye jadid bood, Mohammad-Taqi Seyyed Ahmadi, <http://manjanigh.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/falakhan110.pdf>

▪

(retrieved 7 September 2018).

[15](#)

•

Tolou', personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[16](#)

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A. Behrangi, Baradaram Samad Behrangi, Tabriz: Nashr-e behrangi, 1378, p. 172.

[17](#)

•

Sarkouhi, p. 12.

[18](#)

•

S. Behrangi, Mahi siyah kouchoulou, London: Ketab-e arzan, 1998, p. 16.

[19](#)

•

Hamidiyan, pp. 29–30.

[20](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 284. Behrooz Dehqani's interrogation reports. Behrooz Dowlatabadi's interview with Omid Montazeri, <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=18996>

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(retrieved 25 August 2018). Dowlatabadi refers to June 1968 as the date of this meeting. This is unlikely since Behrooz Dehqani returned to Iran from the US after the death of Samad Behrangi on 31 August 1968. See A. Behrangi, p. 185.

[21](#)

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A. Behrangi, Baradaram Samad Behrangi, pp. 111–113, 164, 175, 179.

[22](#)

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A. Behrangi, Baradaram Samad Behrangi, pp. 193–194, 200, 205.

[23](#)

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Asghar Izadi, private correspondence, 2 June 2019; Falakhan, no. 38, Asghar Izadi.

[24](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 249. 'Abbas Meftahi's interrogation reports.

[25](#)

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19 Bahman-e Theoric, no. 7, pp. 10–11; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 286–291; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 249. ‘Abbas Meftahi’s interrogation reports.

[26](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 339, 340, 394–395; 19 Bahman-e Theoric, no. 7, p. 15.

[27](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 268–270.

[28](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

[29](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998 and 15 August 2015, a Parisian suburb.

[30](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998. All information on Hirmanpour in the next two paragraphs is based on this interview.

[31](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998; Ahmadzadeh, pp. 23–24.

[32](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

[33](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

[34](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998; Ahmadzadeh, p. 54.

[35](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 54, 158; Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

[36](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 20.

[37](#)

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Tolou', personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[38](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 249.

[39](#)

▪

Information in this paragraph based on Hamidiyan, pp. 21–22, 24–25, 26.

[40](#)

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Naqi Hamidiyan, personal correspondence, 3 June 2019.

[41](#)

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Nasser Mohajer, “Bagher Parham on Amir-Parviz Pouyan”, Iran Namag, vol. 1, no. 4.

42

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Teymour Piravani, “Shelik be ghalb-e setam az markaz-e setam”, Khandan ba galouy-e khounin, *Alternative*, p. 20,
<http://www.peykarandeesh.org/files/pdf/safAzad/pooyan.pdf>

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(retrieved 3 September 2018); Tolou[‘], personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris; Nasser Mohajer, “Bagher Parham on Amir-Parviz Pouyan”; interview with ‘Abdollah Kowsari, <http://www.mokhbernews.ir/Home/ShowNewsInfo/4642351>

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(retrieved 5 September 2018); interview with Gholam-Hoseyn Sa‘edi by Zia Sedqi,
<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/archive/honarerooz/honarerooz/archive/2015>.

▪

(retrieved 2 September 2018).

43

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 295–296. Naderi maintains that the two met during Meftahi’s second year at university, which would be the academic year 1343–1344 (1964–1965). This claim is also made in “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, p. 3. Yet Kazem Salahi entered Tehran University in the fall of 1344 (1965) or the academic year of 1965–1966 and could not have been Meftahi’s classmate during the academic year 1964–1965 at Tehran University. See http://amooarvand.blogspot.com/2007/08/blog-post_12.html

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(retrieved 10 February 2019). Personal correspondence with Amooarvand, 21 February 2019.

[44](#)

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Naqi Hamidiyan maintains that by the time their circle joined the Meftahi group between October and December 1967 (Pa'iz 1346), that group had been formed a few months earlier (chand mah zoodtar), hence July to September 1967. According to Hamidiyan, at the time, the Sari circle only knew that they were joining a group with Meftahi involved in it. Personal correspondence, 3 June 2019.

[45](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 247. 'Abbas Meftahi's interrogation reports.

[46](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 248. 'Abbas Meftahi's interrogation reports.

[47](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 295–296; “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan-Meftahi”, p. 15, refers to contacts between Kazem Salahi and Bijan Hirmanpour. Hirmanpour recalled that he saw Kazem Salahi for the first time in prison and did not know him before. Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998, a suburb of Paris.

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 295–296; “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, p. 15.

[49](#)

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Bahram Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), pp. 10–11; personal correspondence with Bahram Qobadi, 4 August 2019.

[50](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 248. ‘Abbas Meftahi’s interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 249, 265, 275, 294–295.

[51](#)

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Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), pp. 20–21; personal correspondence with Bahram Qobadi, 6 August 2019.

[52](#)

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Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), pp. 21–22, 24, 36, 45, 61.

[53](#)

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Toulou‘, personal interview, 20 March 2015, Paris.

[54](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 81.

[55](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 248.

[56](#)

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“Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, pp. 10–11, 15–16; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 274, 280, 907; Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 8; Hamidiyan, pp. 28–33.

[57](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 65.

[58](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 231. Farhoudi’s interrogation reports.

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 232. Farhoudi’s interrogation reports.

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 232. Farhoudi’s interrogation reports; Hamidiyan, p. 66.

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Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), p. 23.

[62](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 301–302. Farhoudi’s interrogation reports.

[63](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 301–302. Kazem Salahi’s interrogation reports. Hamidiyan, p. 66, puts the date of the robbery at 10 Mehr or 2 October 1970. This date seems incorrect as 10 Mehr 1349 was a Friday, which is a public holiday on which banks are closed. Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 146; in his interrogations, Tavakoli puts the date at 27 Mehr or 19 October 1979.

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 301. There are at least five different accounts of the sum stolen: Hamidiyan, 220,000; Naderi, 235,000; Keyhan, 15 Farvardin 1350, 240,000 tomans; and “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, pp. 16–17, 290,000 and 330,000 tomans.

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Hamidiyan, pp. 66–72.

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 310, 317; Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 14.

[67](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 310–311. ‘Ali-Reza Nabdell’s interrogation reports; “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, p. 18.

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 312; “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, p. 18. Ashraf refers to 15 Bahman 1349 or 4 February 1971 as the date of the attack, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 11.

[69](#)

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A. Dehqani, *Bazrhay-e mandegar*, Essen: Nima, 2005, p. 26.

[70](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 312–314; “Gorouh-e Ahmadzadeh – Pouyan – Meftahi”, p. 18.

[71](#)

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Dehqani, pp. 33–34. The introduction to this book was written by Hamid Ashraf in 1352.

[72](#)

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Bonachea and Valdés, p. 180.

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Dehqani, p. 34.

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 313, 319. Interrogation reports of Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh and Falaki.

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Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, p. 74; Hajir Palaschi in http://azer-online.com/tarikh/more/cherik_tabriz.htm

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(retrieved 20 August 2018); Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 396–398; Falakhan, no. 110, Mohammad-Taqi Seyyed Ahmadi.

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Ettela'at, 22 Esfand 1350.

Armed Struggle in Iran: Rural or Urban

From a theoretical point of view, the heavy influence of Mao, and more significantly that of Che, was undeniable among Iranian revolutionaries. The emphasis that the two international revolutionary icons placed on making revolution, and the employment of armed struggle, provided Iranian revolutionaries with ideological vindication of their path. However, once armed struggle was accepted, where it should be conducted became a real challenge. The P-A-M Group was initially in favour of urban warfare, while the H-A-S Group, under the influence of Safa'i-Farahani, privileged rural operations.

The practical discussions among the two revolutionary groups, from about August 1970 to January 1971, over the suitability of commencing operations in rural/mountainous regions, was a manifestation of divergent positions on this issue. The impact of the Shah's land-reform policies forced the revolutionaries to turn their attention to urban armed struggle as the main arena of operations. Iranian revolutionaries looked up to the Cuban experience as a model to be emulated. Yet they knew that the conditions in Iran were not conducive to a mountain-based guerrilla struggle. In their writings, they tried to make the Cuban model more applicable to conditions in Iran. In their analysis, the urban-based aspect of the Cuban Revolution outweighed the importance of its mountainous-based activities. In practical terms, the urban-first vision of armed struggle came to prevail among the Fada'i guerrillas around March 1971. Lessons of the Siyahkal strike strengthened the hand of those in favour of urban rather than rural guerrilla warfare.

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Theoretical positioning

Zia-Zarifi assessed the comparative preparedness of rural and urban forces in his piece, which came to be known as The Jazani Group's Thesis. He argued that the Shah's land reform had had a considerable effect on the rural structure in Iran, and as such, had "dealt a very serious blow to feudalism".¹

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Zia-Zarifi posited that, according to official government figures, twenty-five percent of the rural population had benefitted from land reform, and he concluded that the village toilers and peasants were not in a position of "revolutionary explosion".²

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In Zia-Zarifi's analysis, peasants would neither join the reactionary forces of the dictatorship nor unite with the revolutionary forces.

Zia-Zarifi was much more optimistic about the revolutionary potential of urban forces. The city toilers, he argued, were living under the pressure of abject poverty, unemployment, and disease, while despotism prevented them from organizing in trade unions.³

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He believed that the urban masses had never reconciled with the regime and remained its "implacable enemy".⁴

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For Zia-Zarifi, the 5 June 1963 uprising, the assassination of Prime Minister Hasan-'Ali Mansour on 27 January 1965, and the attempt on the Shah's life on 10 April 1965 were all indications of the hostility of urban toilers towards the Shah's regime. In his assessment, the regime had lost its social legitimacy and

respect among the urban workers, petty bourgeoisie, and intellectuals.⁵

•

Based on the readiness of urban social forces to join the armed struggle, Zia-Zarifi argued that “the political environment of cities will be under the complete control of whichever revolutionary force who commences the overthrow operation.”⁶

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Zia-Zarifi believed that the urban population was more inclined to join the struggle than the rural population. He warned his readers against easy parallels and duplications based on the Cuban experience and recommended planning based on the specific subjective and objective conditions of Iran.⁷

•

Zia-Zarifi did not discard completely operations outside cities (*kharej az shahr*), without explaining what he meant exactly by the term outside cities. In 1966, he had suggested that to launch an armed struggle, “a small mobile group with revolutionary daring and consciousness, capable of combining activities in and outside cities” was needed. His model, in this case, was the Cuban experience. The guerrillas, he argued, would shatter fear and repression by “striking minor and major blows to the hegemony of the regime in the cities while the forces outside the cities would become organized for the protracted battle”.⁸

•

For Zia-Zarifi, that version of the Cuban model, which laid great emphasis on the urban forces, synchronized with the forces “outside cities”, was most suitable to the Iranian socio-economic conditions.

The object of Pouyan’s rather short piece, the “Spring Pamphlet”, was a call to action, not theoretical pontifications. He was primarily concerned with the why and not the how and where of armed struggle. Pouyan’s message was clear and potent: confronting dictatorship was possible only through revolutionary action, and Marxism could be learnt only by such action.⁹

•

However, once armed struggle began, Pouyan’s prime concern was for the vanguard to connect with the proletariat. The role of the vanguard, the “proletarian intellectuals”, was to draw the proletariat to the movement. Under

despotic conditions, workers subjected to the “fascistic hegemony of the police” remained paralysed. For Pouyan, only armed struggle could attract the working class to the revolutionary struggle.¹⁰

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Aside from general references to the role of the people and the masses in an anti-despotic movement, Pouyan paid particular attention to the proletariat, young workers, intellectuals, and even high school students.¹¹

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Pouyan believed that in the process of armed struggle, the proletariat would join the movement. The “proletarian vanguard”, presumably replacing the “proletarian intellectuals”, would draw upon its own class to carry out the struggle and would eventually organize a working-class party.¹²

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Pouyan was almost exclusively concerned with the proletariat and their intellectual vanguard.

Pouyan’s silence on issues concerning rural and land-tenure conditions in Iran is meaningful. He did not discuss the political and economic predisposition of the free tenants and agricultural workers, their demands, and expectations, and finally, their revolutionary potential in the armed struggle. Pouyan did not seem to envisage a role for rural Iran in the armed struggle. One could postulate that for him, the ideal base for launching armed struggle would have been urban rather than rural areas. In his insurrectionary manifesto, Pouyan did not even refer to the Cuban or Chinese revolutionary experience. He seemed interested in challenging his potentially revolutionary readers to think outside the constraints of the classical box of rural-based insurrectionary movements.

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Ahmadzadeh gently parts with the Cuban model

In his treatise on the necessity of armed struggle, Ahmadzadeh spoke of how his group came to an important fork in their political thinking around 1968. Having read Marxist–Leninist texts and studied the socio-economic conditions of their country, his group was looking for practical solutions. It needed to choose between founding a party of the proletariat or creating an armed nucleus in the rural areas. Ahmadzadeh later explained that this was not really a choice as the Group believed in both the creation of a proletarian party and conducting armed struggle. However, members quickly realized that timewise one had to take precedence over the other.¹³

▪

Ahmadzadeh reported that at first the Group rejected the path of a Cuban style guerrilla war in the rural areas.¹⁴

▪

According to Ahmadzadeh, it was through Régis Debray’s book that his group had obtained an understanding of the workings of the Cuban Revolution.¹⁵

▪

So rejecting the Cuban model meant refuting Régis Debray’s rural foco thesis. The argument that land reform had undermined the revolutionary momentum of the countryside seemed compelling. It deflected attention away from the rural and towards the role of urban centres and the proletariat.¹⁶

▪

Hesitations based on the results of field research in rural Iran and the political conclusions drawn from it continued to stir discussions among the Group. The Group’s findings demonstrated that the main objective of the Shah’s regime was to diffuse the possibility of a revolution in the rural areas and subsequently suppress any revolutionary initiatives which may arise.¹⁷

▪

Ahmadzadeh, however, found a way to salvage the revolutionary potential of the rural areas, even after land reform. He argued that the government’s bureaucratic arm in rural areas had replaced the feudal lords, pitting much of the rural population against the bureaucratic and repressive machine of the regime. The newly established “forest and pasture guards” were presented as an example of such bureaucratic agencies.¹⁸

▪

Whereas a classical bourgeois revolution initially liberated the productive energies of the cities, Ahmadzadeh argued that the Shah's White Revolution worsened the condition of the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Iran's dependent capitalism in the age of imperialism, he argued, bankrupted Iran's small producers for the benefit of foreign interests, monopoly capitalists, and prominent bureaucrats. In Ahmadzadeh's assessment, feudalism had been abolished without peasants being liberated, and the national bourgeoisie, the supposed beneficiaries of a bourgeois revolution, were worse off because of Iran's subjugation to imperialism.¹⁹

▪

Ahmadzadeh suggested that lessons were to be learnt from revolutionary wars in Cuba, China, and Vietnam. In countries where the principal base of the revolution was in rural areas, although rural masses were disorganized, the only means of mobilizing them was through armed struggle.²⁰

▪

The defeat of the regular army had required the widest mobilization of the rural masses to create a people's army. Only a protracted guerrilla war in the rural areas could forge such a mobilization.²¹

▪

However, in the absence of widespread mass movements, in rural areas, the guerrilla foco's main objective could not be that of arming the rural masses but of launching a military operation. Once the rural campaign was begun, the "sustenance and growth of the established revolutionary bases", Ahmadzadeh argued, needed the support of urban forces. Without the support of urban forces, the rural revolutionary bases would perish.²²

▪

Ahmadzadeh made the success of the rural foco contingent upon a robust urban foco.

Before writing his treatise on armed struggle, Ahmadzadeh had read Clea Silva's criticism of Debray called "The Errors of the Foco Theory".²³

▪

Contrary to Debray, Silva argued that "the revolutionary movement is generated and takes shape in the cities, passes through the countryside, and at the same

time grows in the cities, in either explosive or underground forms of struggle.” By incorporating some of Silva’s ideas on the importance of urban struggle in the revolutionary movement, Ahmadzadeh placed greater immediate importance on urban warfare, without undermining the Cuban model.²⁴

▪

Ahmadzadeh ruled that the survival and expansion of a revolutionary foco, while under constant siege by the army, was impossible without “deep connections with urban movements” and “serious support from the cities”. To highlight the growing significance of urban revolutionary activities, Ahmadzadeh reminded his readers that certain Latin American revolutionaries, without naming them, were speaking of how “urban armed struggle was picking up momentum.”²⁵

▪

Ahmadzadeh sought to demonstrate that certain aspects of the Cuban experience supported his emphasis on the formation of urban bases.

Ahmadzadeh reproached Régis Debray for his “mistake” of ignoring or minimizing the importance of urban struggle in the success of the Cuban Revolution. He rhetorically asked, “It is true that in Cuba the decisive struggle took place in the rural areas, but what was the role of urban struggle in the whole picture?”²⁶

▪

Pointing out that Batista could only dispatch one fifth of his army against Fidel Castro because he had been confronted with a serious urban struggle, Ahmadzadeh concluded that under certain circumstances, the guerrilla movement necessitated an organized urban nucleus.²⁷

▪

Ahmadzadeh made an argument for the creation of an armed urban organization either before founding the rural foco or in tandem with it.²⁸

▪

For Ahmadzadeh, Tehran and to a limited extent Esfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad, and a few other major cities were suitable for urban armed struggle. He envisaged major urban cities as the hubs of revolutionary groups. They could connect and unify to form a single powerful armed organization. Ahmadzadeh knew that other than in Tehran, their group had branches in Mashhad, Tabriz, and Sari.

During the initial stages of the movement, irrespective of the locality of operations, the objective of armed campaigns was primarily propaganda and political. The military weight and significance of such operations, Ahmadzadeh argued, was secondary. With the intensification of armed struggle in the urban areas, Ahmadzadeh reasoned, it became crucial to take the war to the rural areas.²⁹

•

He conceded that in certain locations, such as Kordestan, the northern parts of the country, and Azarbayjan, where revolutionary groups were ready for action, rural warfare was the best mode of struggle.³⁰

•

Without excluding armed struggle in the rural areas, Ahmadzadeh was modifying Debray's key recommendation concerning the primacy of the rural foco. If for Castro and Che the rural-mountainous foco had established itself, expanded, and then overflowed into the urban, for Ahmadzadeh the armed struggle movement could work the other way around. It could start in the urban, intensify, and then pass over into the rural, where it would mature. Ahmadzadeh's view of the endgame was like those of all revolutionary Marxists. The enemy would be brought to its knees by a coordinated urban-rural final military push of the guerrillas. For Ahmadzadeh urban guerrilla warfare played a "vital and decisive role" in the success of the whole movement.³¹

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The importance which Ahmadzadeh attached to urban centres was very much in tune with both Pouyan and Zia-Zarifi. It would be safe to assume that Pouyan was fully in accord with the contents of Ahmadzadeh's manifesto, as it reflected the debates and arguments within the Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi Group, as well as their satellite circles. The proclivity to start armed struggle in densely populated urban areas of Iran was a view shared by Zia-Zarifi, Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and initially Jazani. This position was based on their assessment of the greater revolutionary potential among the proletariat than the rural population. It also reflected their deep misgivings about the possibility of establishing a revolutionary base in the rural areas, after land reform.

▪

Jazani: Rural Iran not the ideal revolutionary base

In his earlier writing, *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, Jazani's ideas on where armed struggle should be launched almost overlapped with Zia-Zarifi and Ahmadzadeh. Later, Jazani changed his position. He minimized the importance of urban armed struggle and made a forceful argument for rural and tribal armed resistance. In *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, probably looking back on Siyahkal, Jazani warned that all wishful thinking about "the potentials of peasant guerrilla warfare and a peasant revolution was doomed". Referring to the inhibiting effect of land reform on rural insurrection, Jazani argued that "a correct understanding of society teaches us to rely on realities and not on theoretical lessons." Nevertheless, he concluded that revolutionary unpreparedness among peasants did not imply renouncing the establishment of armed nuclei outside cities.³²

▪

No sooner had he referred to the importance of revolutionary cells outside the cities than he warned that such revolutionary cells would be unable to engage in rural guerrilla warfare. The peasant class and the rural environment were simply not prepared for the revolution.³³

▪

In his early writing, after some hesitation, Jazani ruled that rural areas were not the appropriate arena for armed struggle.

Basing his argument on "a deep analysis" of the Iranian society, Jazani posited that "armed struggle or the formation of revolutionary cells will begin in the cities." For Jazani, revolutionaries and urban toilers were the initiators of the movement, and consequently armed struggle would begin in urban centres and their periphery. Small and mobile operational bases outside urban areas and far from the reach of enemy armed forces could be established as a potential sanctuary for the urban guerrillas. Jazani provided three arguments in favour of urban armed struggle. An urban-based struggle was accessible to the masses and easier for them to join. It threatened the ruling system from its centre, terrifying its cadres. Finally, it prevented the ruling system from sitting comfortably in its seat, while dispatching its troops to the far-flung corners of the country and

conducting a secret war under an information blackout.³⁴

▪

▪

Jazani's change of heart: Emphasis on rural/mountainous warfare

Some two years after Siyahkal, Jazani, who had been in prison for some five years, reflected on the news of guerrilla activities outside and argued that the vanguard was in “an unfavourable position”.³⁵

▪

He argued that his judgement was based on the revolutionary vanguard's capacity to recruit forces, organize, and acquire revolutionary experience. By this time Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Meftahi, Safa'i-Farahani, and Hasanpour had been executed, and Pouyan, Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Sadeqinejad had been killed in gun battles. The leadership of the guerrilla operations rested with Hamid Ashraf. To explain the “unfavourable position” of the Fada'i guerrillas, Jazani revisited the tactics employed by them. He deemed these tactics as incorrect. Jazani identified where the revolutionary forces ought to have focused their attention after the Siyahkal strike. This he did by reiterating what should have been done, in contrast to what was done.

Jazani believed that even though people felt sympathy towards the movement initiated by Siyahkal, they did not necessarily understand or trust it. Siyahkal's achievement, according to Jazani, was that it was “tantamount to (be manzaleh-e) the birth of the armed struggle movement”. However, he believed the baby was stillborn. “A guerrilla movement in the region” would have dawned, he wrote, “had the Siyahkal operation been different”, and had it been able to “continue its activities according to pre-planned tactics”.³⁶

▪

But the “armed revolutionary movement” failed to materialize. Nevertheless, Jazani credited Siyahkal for ending “an almost twenty-year-long record of

liberation movements in Iran beating a retreat”. For Jazani, Siyahkal had initiated “the forward march of the people’s vanguard”.³⁷

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Curiously, Jazani peppered his chastising of Siyahkal for its failure to attain its objective, with instructions for the guerrillas to continue the same rural/mountainous experience. “The tactical defeat at Siyahkal”, he wrote, should not discourage efforts at unleashing armed struggle outside urban areas. Jazani insisted on armed struggle in rural, tribal, and ethnic areas, but gave no tips on the correct tactics to avoid the Siyahkal experience. He compared the post-Siyahkal urban operations of the Fada’is with the Siyahkal operation and concluded that the results of Siyahkal “even from a tactical point of view” were “highly remarkable/noticeable” (besyar cheshmgir).³⁸

•

Jazani pointed out that in the initial stage of armed struggle, emphasis may be placed on the urban struggle, and urban activities may take precedence over rural ones. Nevertheless, the creation of guerrilla cells in the rural areas constituted a necessity. He posited that operations in the rural-mountainous areas would gradually take the upper hand and finally become the determining factor in the movement.³⁹

•

Jazani’s insistence on rural/mountainous operations around 1973/1974 was surprising. He had acknowledged that the Shah’s land reform had satisfied the peasants’ principal demand for land and water.⁴⁰

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Jazani had also warned that the Chinese and Latin American revolutionary tradition of relying on land hunger as a key incentive for fomenting armed struggle in the rural areas was misplaced.⁴¹

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On the one hand, Jazani reiterated that because of land reform “political organizations could not be indifferent to the changes in rural Iran.”⁴²

•

The logical outcome of his argument would be to question the validity of establishing rural bases. On the other hand, he argued that the socio-economic

transformations in rural Iran did not imply “the rejection of armed struggle in rural/mountainous Iran”.⁴³

•

Neglecting the implications of the socio-economic conditions to which he referred repeatedly, Jazani argued that rural/mountainous armed struggle was “important for various reasons”.⁴⁴

•

In an enigmatic manner, he held fast to the idea of relaunching guerrilla operations in the rural/mountainous regions, arguing that this form of armed struggle was of great tactical and strategical significance.⁴⁵

•

Jazani insisted on the idea that Fada’i guerrillas should decrease their urban armed operations and gradually move their theatre of operations outside the urban regions. The guerrillas, he wrote, ought to relocate “a small part of their forces” to the mountainous and rural areas and “engage the enemy in forest areas and the mountainous rural sectors”.⁴⁶

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Jazani concluded that mountainous guerrilla operations should gradually take precedence over urban activities and “eventually take on the main role”.⁴⁷

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As if talking to Hamid Ashraf, Jazani promised that if his directives on how to launch a mountainous guerrilla movement similar to Siyahkal were adopted, “the result would benefit the movement.”⁴⁸

•

Despite Jazani’s insistence on guerrilla activities in the mountainous and rural areas, the Iranian Marxist guerrillas continued to focus their attention on urban operations after the Siyahkal strike. While Jazani felt that it was time for the guerrillas to move to the rural/mountainous areas, the practitioners in the field felt such a move to be premature. Between 1972 and 1976, the guerrillas were busy expanding and consolidating their position in strictly urban areas.

As the guerrilla leadership persevered in their urban form of struggle, Jazani’s chastisement of their policy became more vocal in his subsequent writings.

Jazani attacked the absolute emphasis on armed struggle and especially its urban form. He charged that the Fada'i guerrillas' policy of turning urban struggle into a dogma was indicative of an adventurist tendency. This deviationist tendency, he claimed, led to a divorce between the vanguard and the masses, bringing about the vanguard's inevitable failure.⁴⁹

▪

“In our view”, he wrote, urban armed struggle would never become a mass struggle.⁵⁰

▪

He reasoned that the tactics employed in urban guerrilla warfare prevented the urban masses from joining the movement, and that even the biggest Iranian cities had a limited capacity for absorbing the guerrillas and housing their activities.⁵¹

▪

Jazani, therefore, concluded that the Fada'is did not dispose of sufficient manpower to properly conduct an urban armed struggle that would effectively mobilize the people.⁵²

▪

In around 1973, Jazani claimed that the mountain-based struggle “should have already begun”.⁵³

▪

It seemed as though Jazani was arguing that since the guerrillas were unable to achieve the first stage of their objective, they should move on to the second objective.

Ignoring his arguments in favour of urban armed struggle in *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, Jazani made a new case for the superiority of rural armed struggle. He reasoned that simple/naive actors (*anaser-e sadeh*) would be readily attracted to the struggle led by experienced leaders in the mountains. The mountainous-based armed struggle, he argued, would have no limitations in absorbing revolutionary recruits, be they workers or other social groups.⁵⁴

▪

Keen on moving away from urban guerrilla warfare, Jazani dwelt on armed struggle among tribes and ethnic communities.⁵⁵

▪

Jazani characterized the tribes in Iran (Balouch, Boyerahmadi, Qashqa'i) as promising revolutionary sources. These forces, he argued, had not only military training and experience, but were also traditionally armed.⁵⁶

▪

He predicted that it would not be too long before the Iranian tribes joined the revolutionary movement.⁵⁷

▪

Jazani ruled that the urban guerrillas “ought to” support the tribal initiatives with “all their capabilities”. He believed that the launching and expansion of armed struggle in the mountains would have a “compelling impact” on luring the tribes into open rebellion.⁵⁸

▪

Jazani placed an equal emphasis on the role of oppressed Iranian ethnic communities, such as the Kord, Balouch, and Arabs of Khuzestan. He argued that conditions were “more or less” available for armed struggle among these ethnic groups.⁵⁹

▪

He called on the established revolutionary organizations to contact leaders of these groups and place their military forces at their disposal, even symbolically. Jazani, however, excluded the Azaris from his list.

In sum, Jazani was urging Hamid Ashraf to scale down urban operations to a minimum, reallocate military personnel to the rural/mountainous areas, relaunch armed struggle in the rural/mountainous areas, and rush to the support of tribal and ethnic movements. Ashraf, however, was thinking of training and effectively organizing the growing number of men and women under his command, tightening and bolstering the defences of the guerrilla teams, adjusting and readjusting his military objectives, and finally planning and operationalizing “realistic” (vaqe'binaneh) actions. In the middle of a war, Ashraf was not inclined to reflect on what he believed to be “idealistic” and “unrealistic” schemes and ideas. He felt responsible for sustaining, consolidating, and expanding the armed struggle movement in Iran.⁶⁰

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Ashraf did not consider as serious the peasant movements among the Balouch, Kord, Lor, and Ahwazi ethnic communities. From his point of view, such movements were neither sustainable nor viable.⁶¹

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Notes

[1](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 14.

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 15, 27.

[3](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 16.

[4](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 27.

[5](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 28.

[6](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 28.

[7](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 43.

[8](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, pp. 43–44.

[9](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, p. 43.

[10](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 31–32.

[11](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 33–34.

[12](#)

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Pouyan, Zarourat-e mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh, pp. 37–38.

[13](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 53.

[14](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 23–24.

[15](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 50.

[16](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 24–25.

[17](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 28.

[18](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 40.

[19](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 41–42, 45.

[20](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 78.

[21](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 79.

[22](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 137.

[23](#)

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Hirmanpour, personal interview, 26 March 1998. Hirmanpour distinctly remembered the title of the book in which Clea Silva's work was published: Regis Debray and the Latin American Revolution.

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Huberman and Sweezy, pp. 19–20, 24. *Italicized in the original.*

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 138.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 138.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 139.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 139.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 150–151.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 149–150.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 151.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 53.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 70.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 70–71.

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B. Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, n.p.: 19 Bahman-e Theoric, shomareh 2, 1355, pp. 10, 14.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 47.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 48.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 21–22.

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B. Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, n.p.: 19 Bahman-e Theoric, shomareh 3, 1354. p. 60. This work is commonly known as “Nabard ba dictatori-e Shah”.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 59.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 59.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, pp. 60–61.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 61.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tude'i mishavad, p. 21.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 60.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e Jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 61.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 42.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 67.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 67–68.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 69, 77;
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p. 60.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 95.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 96.

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Ashraf, Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 78–79.

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Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou, pp. 187–189.

Merger Discussions for “Iran’s Revolutionary Armed Movement”

Seyf Dalil-Safa’i had been a member of the urban team, otherwise known as the “urban support team of the mountain”, constituted by Hasanpour since late 1968. When Safa’i-Farahani returned to Iran for the first time at the end of January 1970, Dalil-Safa’i informed him that he had been in touch with ‘Abbas Meftahi but had lost track of him. Safa’i-Farahani encouraged Dalil-Safa’i to find Meftahi, meet with him, and get a sense of what he was thinking and planning.¹

Dalil-Safa’i established contact with Meftahi. The two met and discussed political issues, including armed struggle and possible joint operations. At this time neither divulged his group affiliation.

On Safa’i-Farahani’s second return to Iran in June 1970, he asked Dalil-Safa’i to arrange a meeting with ‘Abbas Meftahi. Meftahi agreed without knowing whom he was going to encounter. One August night, Dalil-Safa’i blindfolded Meftahi, as was the customary security procedure, and took him back to the house he shared with Safa’i-Farahani at 24 Esfand Street in Tehran. Once Meftahi’s blindfold was removed, a moment of surprise must have filled the room as he confronted Safa’i-Farahani, with whom he went way back.²

Meftahi and Safa’i-Farahani had known one another since 1962. Safa’i-Farahani had been a teacher in Sari while studying to earn his high school diploma. When

Safa'i-Farahani sought the help of a mathematics tutor, he was introduced to 'Abbas Meftahi. Meftahi, six years younger than Safa'i-Farahani, proved to be a capable math teacher. Later, Meftahi went to Tehran University, and Safa'i-Farahani continued his studies at Narmak Institute of Technology (Honar sara-ye 'aliy-e narmak). While studying at university, the two kept in touch until Safa'i-Farahani left Iran in the summer of 1968.³

▪

It is most probable that Meftahi had kept in touch with Safa'i-Farahani until January 1968 when the latter went into hiding.

Before their meeting in August 1970, neither Meftahi nor Safa'i-Farahani knew anything about the existence of a parallel revolutionary Marxist group. At their initial meeting, which lasted some four hours, their discussion revolved around armed struggle and the topic of where to start operations, and naturally the relation between urban and mountain activities.⁴

▪

In their deliberations, Meftahi felt as though Safa'i-Farahani was still treating him as the young blood and political novice he had once been when they had first met in Sari.⁵

▪

Safa'i-Farahani was oblivious to the fact that Meftahi was now a leading member of a group more than twice the size of his group. Meftahi was cautious not to reveal much about the size of his group and gave the impression that they were a group of five or six. This must have added to Safa'i-Farahani's impression that Meftahi was not serious.⁶

▪

The air of fear and suspicion fanned by SAVAK reigned, and revolutionary groups were highly cautious about divulging information about themselves.

Meftahi and Safa'i-Farahani probably met three times over a period of one month (August to September).⁷

▪

These meetings had the approval of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh, on the one hand, and Ashraf, on the other.⁸

▪

The leadership of each group must have been curious about the size and capabilities of the other, with an eye to some sort of cooperation. During their meetings, each presented the respective position of his group. It could be surmised that Safa'i-Farahani maintained that operations should start in the mountainous regions and was requesting Meftahi to contribute four or five men. Meftahi, however, must have argued that commencing the struggle in the mountainous areas was wrong, and insisted on starting the operations in urban areas.

In the end, Meftahi turned down Safa'i-Farahani's request for men and refused to commit to the mountain operation.⁹

▪

Before Safa'i-Farahani's departure on his mission, the two reached a dead-end in their discussions. According to Bahram Qobadi, the two groups parted ways as Safa'i-Farahani was a follower of Fidel Castro and 'Abbas Meftahi was a disciple of Marighella.¹⁰

▪

On 5 September 1970, Safa'i-Farahani and five other revolutionaries set out towards Chalous, in Mazandaran, to pursue the operation planned by the H-A-S Group.¹¹

▪

▪

The painful and slow process of negotiation

With the departure of Safa'i-Farahani on mission, and in the absence of Hasanpour, who was doing his military service, Hamid Ashraf took over the negotiations for the H-A-S group. Within the P-A-M Group, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh replaced 'Abbas Meftahi. In this second round of negotiations, each group was represented by a fresh heavyweight. Both were also alumni of

Tehran University. At the core of their discussions was the disagreement over where to start the operations, rural/mountain or urban.

Ahmadzadeh was faced with the fait accompli that Safa'i-Farahani was about to launch a military operation in the mountainous regions. As much as he was in favour of a military strike, he was against a mountainous mission. On the one hand, in his pamphlet, Ahmadzadeh had argued and demonstrated that conditions in Iran were not conducive to starting a rural/mountainous operation and his group members were convinced of the primacy of urban struggle. This key disagreement remained a major hurdle in the practical cooperation and collaboration of the two groups.¹²

▪

On the other hand, in the same treatise, Ahmadzadeh had hammered at the urgency of revolutionary action and the alliance of all revolutionary forces.¹³

▪

Ahmadzadeh was therefore attracted to participating in the official launching of armed struggle and the subsequent possibility of uniting forces with the H-A-S Group. Ahmadzadeh was in an awkward bind. His theoretical formulations directed him in one direction and his sense of revolutionary responsibility to act in another. Ahmadzadeh's decision to help the mountain mission underway would have undoubtedly caused ripples within his group.

Ashraf, on the other hand, was very keen on a close collaboration between the two Marxist revolutionary groups and pushed forcefully for it. His group had discussed two coordinated operations. One intended to attack and disarm a military outpost in a mountainous region. Concomitantly, an "armed propaganda" operation was to be launched in the northern and central provinces. Nevertheless, the H-A-S Group had also debated whether urban operations should precede the mountain operation.¹⁴

▪

Ashraf was in charge of logistics and the coordinator of his group's urban and mountain teams. He knew that his group did not have the capability, manpower, and professional training to carry out sustained strikes. This was a compelling reason for him to pool forces with other revolutionary groups.¹⁵

▪

Between August and early September 1970, while negotiations between Safa'i-Farahani and Meftahi were underway, Ashraf was organizing the logistics for the mountain operation. At this time, Safa'i-Farahani had pressed Ashraf to organize the kidnapping of a few ambassadors. Ashraf's response had been that such operations needed manpower and it was best to delay them until some sort of an agreement was reached in negotiations with Meftahi.¹⁶

▪

As an organizer and guerrilla commander, Ashraf believed in prioritizing operations that were feasible and had a fair chance of success.

From mid-September 1970, Ashraf and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh met regularly on the streets of Tehran to resolve the differences between their respective groups. Ashraf was operating under pressure from Safa'i-Farahani to expedite the discussions and reach a favourable conclusion, buttressing the fighting power of the assault group in the mountains.¹⁷

▪

Safa'i-Farahani was also interested in using the urban networks of the P-A-M Group in Mazandaran.¹⁸

▪

At first in his negotiations with Ashraf, Ahmadzadeh "proposed organizing urban guerrilla warfare based on the theories and experiences of the Brazilian revolution". He argued that guerrilla activities in the mountainous areas had to begin after armed struggle had been launched in the cities. The guerrillas needed to consolidate their urban position before becoming involved in mountainous/rural activities.¹⁹

▪

Ahmadzadeh was convinced that the Cuban model was not suitable to the conditions in Iran, and that urban warfare provided the guerrillas with greater possibilities and scope, and more varied objectives and targets.²⁰

▪

As the negotiations in Tehran dragged on, Safa'i-Farahani, who was moving his men in the North of Iran, was becoming impatient to attack. Expecting reinforcements, Safa'i-Farahani became disappointed with the negotiations as they were not yielding the results he expected.²¹

•

We have no exact knowledge of how Ashraf drew Ahmadzadeh closer to Safa'i-Farahani's position of starting activities in the mountainous areas.²²

•

Ashraf must have highlighted the importance of launching an armed operation and perhaps persuaded Ahmadzadeh with the promise of a simultaneous urban and mountainous military campaign. In mid-November 1970, Ahmadzadeh came around to give his conditional support for the H-A-S Group's mountain operation.

•

Last hurdle: Convincing the P-A-M rank and file

Even though Ahmadzadeh agreed to support Safa'i-Farahani's mission, P-A-M's rank and file were far from convinced about starting operations in the mountainous areas. Even when Ahmad Farhoudi, a member of the P-A-M Group, was sent to join the mountain team, debate among members of the Group continued.²³

•

According to 'Abbas Meftahi, the general reaction of the Sari circle to the commencement of armed activities in the mountains was negative, and his effort to recruit volunteers to join Safa'i-Farahani's mountain team was far from smooth.²⁴

•

Che's death in Bolivia, the failure of his rural foco initiative, and its implications became major issues of discussion among the members of Meftahi's Sari circle. The attraction of Cuba's revolutionary method had begun to fade after Che's death. A critical factor casting doubt on the viability of a Cuban-style experience was the belief that the CIA had learnt important lessons from the Cuban

Revolution and was assisting local governments to nip revolutionary movements in the bud.²⁵

•

During the internal discussions of the Sari branch between August and September 1970, 'Abbas Meftahi seemed dubious about establishing a guerrilla base in the forests of northern Iran (Gilan and Mazandaran). These discussions reflected the concerns raised by Meftahi with Safa'i-Farahani during the first round of negotiations. Ahmad Farhoudi, who eventually joined the mountain team, was initially opposed to the idea of launching guerrilla operations in the northern forests. He argued that, in the absence of active rural support, such an initiative was bound to fail.²⁶

•

At some point, however, probably between November 1970 and January 1971, both Meftahi and Farhoudi overcame their misgivings about operations in mountainous areas and embraced the idea. The clincher was probably the necessity of uniting with other like-minded revolutionary Marxist groups, and the feeling of urgency to begin the armed struggle. Ahmadzadeh repeatedly hammered at these two central concepts in his treatise.

Sometime between December 1970 and January 1971, members in other branches of the P-A-M Group needed to be informed and convinced of the decision to support the mountain operation. 'Abbas Meftahi travelled to Tabriz to inform his brother, Asadollah, and win him over to support the mountain operation. During his visit to Tabriz, the decision to support mountain operations was conveyed to other members of the Tabriz branch. In Tehran, 'Abbas Meftahi met with Nabdell, and explained why the Group was becoming involved in rural/mountainous operations. Meftahi also met with 'Abdolkarim Hajiyan-Sehpoleh and Hoseyn Seyyed-Nowzadi, respectively from the Tehran and Mashhad branches, to explain the change in tactics.²⁷

•

Once Asadollah Meftahi embraced participation in the mountain operation, he in turn, spoke with his sympathizers and secured their consent. Asadollah Meftahi travelled to Tehran around January 1971 and spoke to Asghar Izadi about the idea of going on a mountain operation. Izadi recalled that he was one of those who was to be sent by the P-A-M Group to join Safa'i-Farahani's mountain team.²⁸

▪

Ahmad Farhoudi had participated in the bank robbery of the Melli Bank around the end of September 1970. The police knew of his identity as complicit in the bank robbery, but not as a member of an armed political group. After hiding at Javad Salahi's house for four months, Farhoudi was ready to join the mountain team. On 30 January 1971, or some nine days before the attack on the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station, Farhoudi was driven to Rasht by Hamid Ashraf in a Volkswagen. From Rasht, Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi drove him to the forests around Siyahkal.²⁹

▪

The dispatch of Farhoudi to the mountain group cemented the new phase of close cooperation between the P-A-M and H-A-S groups. Ahmadzadeh and Meftahi continued their efforts at organizing and dispatching more recruits to the mountain team. To this end, some eleven members of the P-A-M Group were identified, prepared, and furnished with the necessary equipment. They were about to leave for Safa'i-Farahani's mountain camp, when news arrived of the attack on Siyahkal.³⁰

▪

The mountain group's five-month reconnaissance mission

Once Safa'i-Farahani and Meftahi failed to come to an agreement during their initial negotiations, Safa'i-Farahani moved ahead with his own plans. On Monday, 2 September 1970, Safa'i-Farahani, accompanied by his team members, Jalil Enferadi, Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i, Mehdi Eshaqi, Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, and 'Abbas Danesh-Behzadi, met with Hamid Ashraf, Eskandar Sadeqinejad, and Ghafour Hasanpour at Haft-Hoz, in the north of Tehran. They discussed the mission, went over the team's tasks and plans, and finalized the members of the mountain team.³¹

▪

Three days later, at 08:00 on Saturday, 5 September 1970, the six-man mountain team led by Safa'i-Farahani began their mission. The team congregated on Amirkabir Street in Tehran and headed towards Chalous, some 155 kilometres away in the Mazandaran province. Some thirty-six kilometres away from Chalous, the team stopped at the Makkar River, and members began the first round of their reconnaissance operation. Ashraf and Sadeqinejad accompanied the team to the Makkar Gorge, some four kilometres to the west, shared a lunch with the team, set the time and place for their next rendezvous, and then returned to Tehran.³²

▪

Ashraf and Sadeqinejad acted as the backbones of the mountain team during its five-month reconnaissance mission. They provided logistical support, maintained communication, and coordinated the activities between the mountain and urban teams. It was Ashraf who was the steady and fixed contact person with the mountain team. Every so often, he would be accompanied by Fazeli. On other occasions, either Sadeqinejad of the urban team or Rahimi-Meschi, one of the two liaison persons for the mountain team, would accompany him. Ashraf travelled to Mazandaran and Gilan once every week or fortnight and met with the mountain team at various points on their reconnaissance route. At these meetings, he replenished their food, clothing, and footwear, purchased the provisions they required, delivered recruits, and brought news of developments in Tehran. He usually spent a day and night with the team and returned to Tehran on the day after.

The members of the mountain team were not strangers to one another. Other than Jalil Enferadi, who was an old mountain climbing friend of Safa'i-Farahani, the other four had been recruited directly or indirectly by Hasanpour. Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i and Hadi Bandekkhoda-Langaroudi were members of Hasanpour's network at Tehran's Polytechnic University. 'Abbas Danesh-Behzadi was a veterinary student at Tehran University when he was recruited by Hasanpour. Mehdi Eshaqi, a geology student at Shiraz University, was recruited by his cousin Sama'i.

After their departure in September, the mountain team carried out two pre-planned reconnaissance exercises in Mazandaran and Gilan, lasting some three and a half months.³³

▪

These exercises aimed at preparing the guerrillas, physically and mentally. Their drills exposed them to the harsh mountainous terrain, and they were given training in mountain climbing, descending ravines and gorges, and crossing waterways. During their expedition, members received basic military training, while they continued to create food, medicine, and weapon stores in the mountains. The original idea was that Mazandaran and Gilan would constitute the geographical base where the guerrillas, having struck at their original target, would establish headquarters and recruit for the people's army.

During their first reconnaissance mission, the mountain team walked from Chalous in Mazandaran to the forests close to Hashtpar in Gilan. Their first crossing took some two and a half months. They covered over 350 kilometres. It was around 23 November when Ashraf and Sadeqinejad met the mountain team in the forests of Hashtpar and walked with them to the Asalem-Khalkhal road. Ashraf and Sadeqinejad, who had come from Tehran with two cars, a Volkswagen and a Mazda truck, drove the team to Rasht, where they showered and rested. The mountain team, along with their arms and equipment, was then driven to Marzanabad, near Chalous, where they began the second leg of their reconnaissance mission.³⁴

•

During their second crossing, the group went towards Gorgan Province, in the opposite direction of Gilan. They walked some 350 kilometres, from the vicinity of Marzanabad to Ramian, some 75 kilometres to the west of the city of Gorgan. Their second crossing took nine weeks. On Saturday, 30 January, having ended its second reconnaissance mission, the mountain team was transported to the vicinity of Siyahkal in three cars.³⁵

•

One can presume that the reason Safa'i-Farahani took his men into Gorgan Province was to wait for reinforcements. It would be fair to assume that by around 30 December 1970, before the team crossed into Gorgan Province, Safa'i-Farahani was ready to take his men back to the Siyahkal area and strike.

During their five-month stay in the Mazandaran, Gilan, and Gorgan Provinces, and before their final assault on Siyahkal, the composition of the team underwent some changes. On 22 November 1970, right at the end of the mountain team's first reconnaissance mission, Ashraf and Sadeqinejad brought a recruit from Tehran. Iraj Salehi was a graduate of Tehran University's Veterinary

School and was recruited by 'Abbas Danesh-Behzadi. With the addition of Salehi, the mountain team grew to seven members. Around 2 December 1970, Ashraf and Sadeqinejad drove another recruit, Mohammad-'Ali Mohaddes-Qandchi, to the camping site of the mountain team in Mazandaran.³⁶

▪

Mohaddes-Qandchi was another graduate of Tehran University's Veterinary School. He knew Salehi and was also recruited by Danesh-Behzadi. With the addition of Mohaddes-Qandchi, the mountain team grew to eight.

On the same day that Mohaddes-Qandchi joined the mountain team, Iraj Salehi, who had spent a fortnight with the guerrillas, decided to discontinue his participation. Salehi slipped out of the camp discreetly. The team, now reduced to seven members, spent a couple of days searching for Salehi. They finally gave up and continued with their planned agenda.³⁷

▪

Somewhere around the first half of January 1971, while the mountain team was still in Mazandaran, Danesh-Behzadi fell ill. He was transported to Fouman and spent some two weeks convalescing at Rahimi-Meschi's house. Danesh-Behzadi rejoined the mountain team about ten days before the attack.³⁸

▪

On Friday, 8 January 1971, Ashraf accompanied Houshang Nayyeri to the guerrillas' campsite. Houshang Nayyeri had just returned from his mission of procuring arms in Iraq.³⁹

▪

With the addition of Houshang Nayyeri, the mountain team grew back to eight members. Ahmad Farhoudi, the representative of the P-A-M Group, joined the mountain team on the same day that it arrived in the area surrounding Siyahkal, having travelled from Gorgan. On 30 January 1971, Safa'i-Farahani's band of comrades came to nine members.

▪

Postponements

At the end of November 1970, once the P-A-M Group agreed to cooperate with the H-A-S Group, Ahmadzadeh asked for a grace period, before Safa'i-Farahani was to attack his target. He intended to use this time to prepare members of his group for the attack, and to launch simultaneous urban operations. Ashraf, therefore, asked Safa'i-Farahani to delay the mountain team's D-Day by some two months. This was why Safa'i-Farahani took his team to Gorgan. As the two-month deadline approached, preparations for sending new P-A-M forces encountered problems.

Between 13 and 19 January 1971, Jalal Naqqash, Ebrahim Delafsordeh, Bijan Hirmanpour, and Kazem Salahi were arrested for reasons unrelated to their association with the P-A-M Group.⁴⁰

▪

The arrests posed severe security challenges, forcing Pouyan and Javad Salahi, Kazem's brother, to evacuate their old residence. Around the end of January, as Pouyan was cleaning his gun at the house shared by 'Abbas Meftahi and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh on Shahbaz Jonoubi Street, he shot himself inadvertently. The bullet went through the side of his body, seriously wounding him. Pouyan was under close medical surveillance and bedridden for about a month at the house of Changiz Qobadi and Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan. Pouyan's misadventure is said to have left him with a psychological scar.⁴¹

▪

As discussions over the dispatching of new fighters dragged on, Safa'i-Farahani became ever more anxious to begin the operations. The prolonging of the second leg of the reconnaissance mission made him nervous. Not only did he fear the possibility of governmental reprisals while he moved his team around, but he was worried about the restlessness and declining morale of his men. Safa'i-Farahani feared being forced into a showdown before having dealt the planned blow. Utterly unbeknownst to the security and military authorities, the mountain team had successfully spent some five months roaming around three provinces, setting up camp, and carrying out military practices.

Prolonging their reconnaissance mission obviously increased the chances of

unwanted encounters with military forces before starting their own operation.⁴²

▪

It must have been sometime in mid-January 1971, while he was in Gorgan Province, that Safa'i-Farahani announced that he would go ahead with his assault plan. Frustrated with the delays, he warned that he would attack sometime between 4 and 19 February 1971, even if that meant breaking relations with the P-A-M Group.⁴³

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Notes

[1](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 208. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897.

[2](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 82; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports.

[3](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 208. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports.

[4](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 157. 'Abbas Meftahi's interrogation reports.

[5](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 82; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 156.

[6](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 156–157. Interrogation reports of ‘Abbas Meftahi and Dalil-Safa’i.

[7](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 208. Safa’i-Farahani’s interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 158. ‘Abbas Meftahi’s interrogation reports.

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Hamidiyan, p. 82; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 208. Safa’i-Farahani’s interrogation reports.

[9](#)

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[10](#)

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Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), p. 28.

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation report.

[12](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 10.

[13](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 147, 149.

[14](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 6, 8–9.

[15](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 9.

[16](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports.

[17](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 12–13.

[18](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 11.

[19](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 170. Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's interrogation reports; Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 9.

[20](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 169. Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's interrogation reports.

[21](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 12–13.

[22](#)

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, pp. 4, 9.

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, p. 13.

[24](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 255. Farhudi's interrogation reports.

[25](#)

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Hamidiyan, p. 80.

[26](#)

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Hamidiyan, pp. 81, 85.

[27](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 313–314. Interrogation reports of Nabel and Meftahi.

[28](#)

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Asghar Izadi, private correspondence, 10 May 2019; Falakhan, no. 38, Jonbesh-e mosallahaneh pasokhi be shekast-e 28 mordad bood, Goftegou ba Asghar Izadi, <http://manjanigh.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/falakhan38.pdf>

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(retrieved 3 June 2019); Asghar Izadi, “man marg ra didam”, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/234831>

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[29](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 228. Farhudi’s interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 168, 174.

[30](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 314. ‘Abbas Meftahi’s interrogation reports.

[31](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 159. See Rowhani, pp. 412–413. Rowhani’s list of attendants differs slightly from Naderi’s even though both are using the same interrogation reports.

[32](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 161; Rowhani, p. 413.

[33](#)

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, p. 14.

[34](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 198–199; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 166; Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 49–52.

[35](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 168.

[36](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 241; Salehi, Esm-e shab, Siyahkal, p. 241. Salehi refers to the exact date of Friday, 11 Azar 1349 (2 December 1970). 11 Azar 1349 was not a Friday but a Wednesday, hence the hesitation.

[37](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale 'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 198–203, 207. Interrogation reports of Iraj Salehi and Safa'i-Farahani. Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 160–168.

[38](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale 'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 175–176. Danesh-Behzadi's interrogation report; Rowhani, p. 1126; Bandekkhoda-Langaroudi's interrogation report.

[39](#)

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Salehi, Esm-e shab, Siyahkal, p. 253; Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 63, 65.

[40](#)

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According to Hirmanpour he was arrested on 29 Dey 1349 (19 January 1971) but Naderi states that he was arrested on 23 Dey 1349 or 13 January 1971. Hirmanpour, personal interview, 15 August 2015, a suburb of Paris; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 307.

[41](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 308–310. Interrogation reports of 'Abbas Meftahi and 'Ali-Reza Nabel. Bahram Qobadi believes that Pouyan was convalescing around

March/April 1971. Bahram Qobadi, personal conversation, 4 August 2019; Qobadi, chapter two (Mehnoush va Changiz), p. 11. Pouyan participated in the attack on the Melli Bank on 13 May 1971.

[42](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 12–13.

[43](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports; Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 14.

The H-A-S Group Hounded

The organizational and coordination complexities of launching the attack at Siyahkal were suddenly compounded by a series of unexpected events in Tehran. Every year, on 16 Azar (7 December), the University Students' Day, a wave of protests and disturbances swept across Iranian universities. SAVAK had been carrying out a series of arrests of "suspicious" political activists, hoping to prevent the usual trouble and turmoil.¹

The arrest of Abolhasan Khatib on 7 December 1970 opened a Pandora's box. Khatib, a student with Marxist tendencies who studied at Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering, divulged the address of a house which he frequented but did not reside in. This house, on Farvardin Street, was occupied by Mas'oud Navabakhsh and Mehdi Ferdowsi. Upon inspection of this house, SAVAK discovered a stash of some 100 Marxist and Maoist books, and a substantial amount of literature belonging to the Maoist group "Toufan". SAVAK also came across suspicious items such as invisible ink, mountain climbing equipment, licence plates, and material for personal disguise.

On the evening of 7 December 1970, SAVAK arrested Mehdi Ferdowsi and Mas'oud Navabakhsh. They quickly learnt that Mehdi Same', Mahmoud Navabakhsh (Mas'oud's brother), and Ebrahim Noshirvanpour had been the previous tenants of the house on Farvardin Street. Furthermore, SAVAK discovered that this house was frequented by Same' and Noshirvanpour whenever they returned to Tehran from their military service in Shiraz. It also

became clear to SAVAK that Hasanpour was among those who frequented this house.²

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This inoffensive student den suddenly looked like a political safe house, threatening and full of secrets. Discovering the house on Farvardin Street had a devastating cascade effect.

Both Hasanpour and Same‘ were arrested on 14 December 1970, seven days after the arrest of Khatib, Ferdowsi, and Mas‘oud Navabakhsh. Nine days later, SAVAK’s new face, the mysterious and ubiquitous Ranking Security Official (maqam-e amniyati), spoke to the press about the arrest of seven members of a “group of saboteurs”. He said four of them were students, and among those arrested, he mentioned Abolhasan Khatib, Mas‘oud Navabakhsh, and Mehdi Ferdowsi. Withholding the names of Hasanpour and Same‘, the Ranking Security Official concluded his interview by mentioning that others who had been arrested were not students.³

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SAVAK was deliberately concealing the names of Hasanpour and Same‘. Both were conscripted military personnel, and given the information SAVAK had obtained, it must have believed it had discovered an intriguing high-priority case. Hoping to get quick leads from Hasanpour and Same‘, SAVAK aimed at arresting rapidly the remainder of the “saboteurs” and dismantling their network.

On 28 December 1970, two weeks after the arrest of Hasanpour and Same‘, the Ranking Security Official appeared on television and brushed aside the threat of guerrilla warfare in Iran as “a joke”.⁴

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About a month before the Ranking Security Official’s comment, the US Ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II, had been invited to dinner at the home of Asadollah ‘Alam, the Minister of Court. After midnight, on 30 November 1970, while returning home, the Ambassador’s black Cadillac had been ambushed by a team of five urban guerrillas, four men and a woman, in two cars, a Chevrolet and a Chrysler. The Ambassador’s car was riddled by bullets and attacked with an axe as the assailants attempted to reach the person of the Ambassador. Thanks to their driver, Douglas MacArthur and his wife avoided the kidnapping attempt on Zafar Street. This operation was carried out

by Syrus Nahavandi's organization, the Iranian People's Liberation Organization (Sazeman-e azadibakhsh-e khalqha-ye Iran).⁵

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The incident "infuriated and disturbed the Shah".⁶

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The Iranian authorities made the kidnapping attempt public after fourteen months.⁷

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SAVAK knew that armed struggle was bubbling, but had no clue of the identity of those involved.

The items discovered at Hasanpour's house, and in his father's home in Lahijan, were incriminating. They included a detailed topographical map of Roudsar, with the gendarmerie station clearly marked on it, two pages of Marighella's A Pamphlet for the Urban Guerrilla (Jozveh'i baray-e cherik-e shahri), and another two pages of a document on armed revolution as the only alternative for the liberation of Iran.⁸

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The compromising items discovered at three different locations must have convinced SAVAK that these were not armchair revolutionaries, or merely an intellectual Marxist study circle. The maps, which singled out a gendarmerie station, the mountain climbing equipment, the licence plates, as well as the revolutionary literature, must have raised SAVAK's suspicions about the possible existence of a more extensive network of militants. SAVAK must have thought that it had found the network connected with the ambush of the American Ambassador.

SAVAK's behaviour towards Hasanpour and Same', from the first day of their incarceration at Evin prison, indicated that SAVAK was entirely in the dark about the activities of both the P-A-M and H-A-S groups. However, it was desperate to learn about the subversive opposition brewing under the surface. SAVAK's interrogators needed information, and they were sanctioned to use torture. Hasanpour was the most knowledgeable repository of information in the entire H-A-S organization. He was not only privy to the composition of the urban team but also knew the mountain team, its composition, its date of

departure, plans, and probably movements and progress. He even knew the general location of the imminent attack. When Hasanpour was arrested, the mountain team had been on the march for almost three and a half months. They had almost completed the second phase of their reconnaissance mission and were ready to attack. Most importantly, Hasanpour must have been aware of the negotiations between Ashraf and Ahmadzadeh on reconciling difference and pooling resources.

Hasanpour had not only set up logistical support networks for the mountain team, but knew the details of how they functioned, and who they were. Manouchehr Baha'ipour was based in Lahijan. He was one of the two logistical coordinators for the mountain group during their reconnaissance mission in Gilan. Hasanpour and Same' had recruited him. Between 26 and 30 January 1971, Ahmad Farhoudi had stayed with Manouchehr Baha'ipour's father in Lahijan before joining the mountain team.⁹

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Hasanpour was the central nervous system of the H-A-S Group and informed about the activities of the P-A-M Group in relation to his own. Same' also possessed considerable information, but not nearly as much nor as sensitive as Hasanpour.

Had Hasanpour and Same' divulged all the information they had upon their arrest, or even a month after their arrest, the whole H-A-S Group would have been compromised and probably dismantled. While Hasanpour was mostly in Shiraz doing his military service, Ashraf must have reported his discussions with Ahmadzadeh to Hasanpour, Fazeli, and Sadeqinejad. Hasanpour's confessions under torture could have also compromised the P-A-M Group. Most importantly, information extracted from Hasanpour could have sealed the fate of the mountain group before they even started their operation.

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The beans are spilled

Forty-seven days after the arrest of Hasanpour and Same‘, SAVAK had not proceeded with any further arrests among the members of the H-A-S Group. Either SAVAK had not been able to extract the information it needed soon enough to make quick headway with further arrests, or it was waiting patiently to obtain new leads before carrying out widespread arrests. If SAVAK had obtained all Hasanpour knew, it would have known that an attack on a sensitive military target was imminent around Kakouh. It would have also known the identity of members of the mountain team and its liaison people. This information would have certainly prompted SAVAK to push on with arrests to avoid the embarrassing first armed attack on a military station.

On the forty-eighth day after the arrest of Hasanpour and Same‘, three members of the H-A-S urban team were arrested. Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli, Sho‘a‘ollah Moshayyedi, and Esmā‘il Mo‘ini-‘Araqi were rounded up by SAVAK on 31 January 1971. Seyf Dalil-Safa‘i was arrested a day later.¹⁰

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Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi was arrested on 2 February 1971 at the school where he taught near Fouman in Gilan.¹¹

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Six days before the attack on Siyahkal, with the arrest of Rahimi-Meschi, SAVAK was getting closer to deciphering the riddle. Yet it was still in the dark about the whole picture and most importantly the attack on the gendarmerie station. The regime did not know what was awaiting it at Siyahkal because Hasanpour was not giving them the information they needed.

According to an adulterated and doctored report of Hasanpour’s alleged interrogation by SAVAK, dated Friday, 15 January 1971 (25 Dey 1349), Hasanpour made a thorough confession naming about twenty people he knew in connection with the H-A-S Group. This typed document was published in a periodical by the “Political Studies and Research Institute” in Iran. This organization has control over SAVAK’s unpublished interrogation reports and files on political activists, revolutionaries, and organizations of all persuasions during the Shah’s regime. The date of the interrogation report attributed to Hasanpour should be viewed with great scepticism, and assumed to be incorrect until the original document, with Hasanpour’s handwriting and the official date

of the interrogation, is made public.

What makes the date of this interrogation report (15 January 1971) most unlikely is SAVAK's reaction. If SAVAK had had sensitive information about the most important players of the mountain and urban teams twenty-four days before the attack on Siyahkal and sixteen days before the first wave of arrests, why did it react so very slowly? Based on Hasanpour's alleged interrogation report, he had revealed the identity of six out of the nine members in Safa'i-Farahani's mountain team and indicated that Safa'i-Farahani was the team's leader. Hasanpour was said to have even informed his interrogators on 15 January 1971 that he and his friends had surveyed Kakouh. In this interrogation report, Kakouh was mentioned four times and Hasanpour had supposedly revealed the true identities of various members of the urban and liaison team.

Why would SAVAK and the regime not have taken Hasanpour to the area to guide them to where the guerrillas were supposed to be? Why would the regime not have poured troops in the Kakouh region as of 16 January 1971? Why would SAVAK not have arrested Iraj Nayyeri, the Siyahkal teacher whose name was mentioned three times in connection with expeditions and surveys of Kakouh? Why would SAVAK have dilly-dallied for twenty days before arresting Iraj Nayyeri on 4 February 1971? If by 15 January 1971, SAVAK had been informed by Hasanpour or Same' that the urban team, a Marxist guerrilla group, had produced TNT, possessed arms and ammunition, and robbed banks, why had it waited two weeks before closing in on the urban team? The simple answer is that SAVAK did not have all this information on 15 January 1971.

The interrogation report dated 15 January 1971 and attributed to Hasanpour contains major inconsistencies. For example, Hasanpour mentioned Ashraf's name twenty times.¹²

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The first four times, Hasanpour referred to Ashraf as Ahmad Ashraf (Hamid's older brother), and then, on sixteen successive occasions, he referred to him as Hamid Ashraf. How could Hasanpour confuse Hamid Ashraf with his brother Ahmad Ashraf? What makes this document even more suspect is that by 4 February 1971, according to SAVAK's own internal documents, Hamid Ashraf's identity and real name were unknown to SAVAK. Yet, supposedly, Hasanpour had confessed to the identity of Hamid Ashraf twenty days earlier. Based on Hasanpour's interrogation report (15 January 1971), SAVAK had known that

Hamid Ashraf had been originally in charge of the mountain group, had later become the leader of the urban team, and was a key liaison person between various members of the Group. Yet, by 3 and 4 February 1971, SAVAK was still in the dark about 'Abbas (Ashraf's alias), and the key liaison between the urban and mountain teams who was none other than Ashraf.¹³

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The arrests begin

SAVAK made its first important series of arrests some one and a half months after the arrest of Hasanpour and Same'. The arrests were carried out primarily among the urban support team. Fazeli, a one-time leader of the urban team, was arrested on 31 January 1971 along with Mo'ini-'Araqi and Moshayyedi. Dalil-Safa'i was arrested on 1 February, and Ahmad Khorramabadi on 9 February 1971.

During his trial, Bahman Naderipour provided an account of how SAVAK obtained information about the H-A-S Group, leading to arrests in Tehran and Gilan. According to Naderipour (Tehrani), it was only after he and Reza Attarpour had been dispatched to Rasht on Thursday, 4 February 1971 that SAVAK had learnt about the Siyahkal operation. According to Naderipour's testimony, SAVAK did not learn about the names of the mountain team until after the attack against Siyahkal.¹⁴

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It would be difficult to ascertain who said what, and to map out the process by which one arrest led to another until publication of all authentic interrogation reports obtained from Marxist revolutionaries, in their original handwriting and in their entirety. Even then, the reports could be misleading. We do not know the details of what happened to Hasanpour after his arrest, but we do know what happened to Same'. The treatment Hasanpour received could be partially constructed on how SAVAK dealt with Same'.

On Monday, 14 December 1971, Same' was arrested in Shiraz. He was blindfolded and transferred to Tehran. Upon arrival at Evin prison on Tuesday, he was taken to the special interrogation room. Without a word exchanged, he was undressed down to his shorts, and while still blindfolded, he was tied down to a bed. He was whipped on his back and buttocks, receiving some ten to twenty lashes. His torturers removed his blindfold. Same' recalled that Reza Attarpour (alias Hoseynzadeh) was sitting at the end of a long room. He remembered Attarpour advising him to give up all his information and obtain his immediate freedom in return. When Same' denied knowledge of any wrongdoing, he was confined to the interrogation room and tortured for six more days.¹⁵

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According to the confessions of Bahman Naderipour and Farajollah Seyfi Kamangar (alias Kamali), during their trial, Reza Attarpour Mojarrad (alias Doctor Hoseynzadeh) was one of the most effective torturers of SAVAK.¹⁶

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Later, according to SAVAK's personal file on him, Attarpour rose in rank to become one of the assistant directors of SAVAK's Third Bureau, responsible for domestic security.¹⁷

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During the first two or three days, Same' was whipped on the back and buttocks. Later his torturers focused on lashing the soles of his feet. The torture tools were usually black metal cables of various sizes, anywhere between one and two and a half centimetres in diameter. During seven macabre days in the interrogation room, Same' was subjected to sleep deprivation between the beatings. At times, his hands were cuffed behind his back, in an excruciating manner, one hand twisted from above over the shoulder, the other hand twisted from below over the lower back. Same' did not lose consciousness during the seven days, but he did lose his balance and fall to the ground due to sleeplessness. After rounds of whipping, he was forced to walk on his swollen, bloodied feet, which collapsed under the weight of his body.

According to Same', most of the whipping was done by Mohammad-Ali Sha'bani (alias Hoseyni), while his interrogators were Reza Attarpour (Hoseynzadeh), Bahman Naderipour (alias Tehrani), and Mohammad-Hasan Naseri (alias 'Azodi). After a week of incessant torture, Same' was sent to

solitary confinement.¹⁸

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Some forty-four days after the end of Same‘’s first week-long torture session, SAVAK was still missing some key information. On 4 February 1971, Attarpour, who was in Rasht along with the chief of Rasht’s SAVAK, sent word to Tehran, requesting vital intelligence. They demanded that information be extracted from Same‘ about the high-priority liaison person, ‘Abbas (Ashraf), who had delivered two and a half kilos of TNT explosives to the mountain team.¹⁹

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One can only presume that immediately after his arrest, Hasanpour was treated in the same brutal fashion. The treatment received by those arrested varied according to their behaviour and interaction with their interrogators and torturers. Hasanpour’s fate turned out to be much worse than that of Same‘. According to Lotfollah Meysami, a member of the Mojahedin at the time, Reza Attarpour later threatened another prisoner by reminding him that “you are no better than Hasanpour, he was forced to tell us all he knew, once we cut off one of his legs.”²⁰

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The interminable flogging of Hasanpour led to severe gangrene setting into his left foot, and eventually, his leg was amputated by SAVAK.²¹

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Hasanpour had been so badly brutalized during his torture sessions that it was difficult for even his old comrades to recognize him at Evin. He is said to have been completely deformed and incapable of standing up.²²

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The mountain team compromised

It was not until 4 February 1971 that SAVAK began taking interest in the activities of the mountain team. Two important reports shed light on the extent of SAVAK's knowledge about the mountain team. The first report was by Reza Attarpour, who was assigned to the mountain and urban activities of the guerrillas. This first report was dispatched from Rasht, some thirty-nine kilometres from Siyahkal, where a security-military cell had been established to counter the mountain operation.

The second report was by Colonel Sheykholeslami, Rasht's Chief of SAVAK.²³

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The two reports, with overlapping information, unveiled SAVAK's intelligence insight into the activities of the mountain team four days from the Siyahkal attack. By 4 February, SAVAK knew that from Saturday, 30 January 1971, the mountain team had crossed Mazandaran into Gilan, and on that same day two and a half kilos of TNT had been delivered to the mountain team in Gilan by 'Abbas – the key liaison between the urban and mountain teams. SAVAK had already arrested Iraj Nayyeri, one of the mountain team's liaison people, and knew that Fazeli had travelled to the mountainous regions twice in the past. SAVAK thought that the mountain team had ten members, which meant that it was not aware that Iraj Salehi had slipped away. Furthermore, at this time, SAVAK was unaware of the names of the mountain team, and ignored the identity of Ashraf.²⁴

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Most importantly, the two reports indicated that four days before the attack, SAVAK had no idea of the mountain team's specific location or what it was planning to do.

After the arrests of Hasanpour and Same', the H-A-S Group's reaction to a real threat was surprisingly slow and feeble. No serious precautions were taken to avert an assault on the organization in case those arrested were forced to divulge sensitive information. Ashraf, who was highly sensitive to security issues, was alarmed for about a fortnight, and then thinking that the danger had passed, slipped back into his normal mode of operation. The Group neither placed the remaining members on a long-term alert, nor instructed those who were still leading a public life to go underground. Later, Ashraf argued that since Hasanpour was arrested in connection with activities unrelated to the Group, they thought that there was no reason to presume that he would divulge

information about the Group.²⁵

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Around 1 January 1971, Ashraf met with the mountain team which roamed around Mazandaran. During his seventh routine meeting with Safa'i-Farahani's team, on Lake 'Abbas-Abad, some nine kilometres away from Behshahr, in Mazandaran, Ashraf reported on the arrest of Hasanpour. At this time, two weeks had elapsed since Hasanpour had been in SAVAK's custody. Gathered around a bonfire, Ashraf also gave news of Saffari-Ashtiyani's return from Iraq and the fact that final agreements with the P-A-M Group were underway. Throughout this meeting, Ashraf was full of hope about future cooperation between the two groups, and the strengthening of the mountain team.²⁶

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According to Safa'i-Farahani, as D-Day approached, Ashraf was worried about the ripple effect of arrests in Tehran and began voicing doubts about launching the operation. During their penultimate meeting, probably on Friday, 29 January 1971, Ashraf argued against launching the mountain operation. He reasoned that given the Group's unstable and fragile situation in Tehran, it was best to delay the assault for another month or two. Ashraf recommended that the strike be further postponed until spring 1971. Safa'i-Farahani rejected Ashraf's proposal at this meeting.²⁷

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Before this meeting, Ashraf had consulted with Ahmadzadeh, and the two had been in agreement that the mountain team should delay its operation until the training of recruits from the P-A-M Group was completed.²⁸

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It seems that Ashraf was worried about the Group's vulnerable condition after the arrest of Hasanpour, and the possibility that the mountain operation would be compromised. He may also have believed that, with the possible addition of members of the P-A-M Group, the mountain team would have greater chances of success. Finally, the advantages of operating in more favourable weather conditions in the spring may have weighed on Ashraf when he asked for a delay.

Ashraf had one last meeting with Safa'i-Farahani, probably on Friday, 5 February 1971. This was three days before the attack on the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station, and a few days after the second round of raids in Tehran

against the urban team. Ashraf informed Safa'i-Farahani of the new wave of arrests on 31 January and 1 February 1971. Ashraf cautioned that the situation had become muddled and confusing, as key members of the urban cell, Fazeli, Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi, and Dalil-Safa'i, had been arrested. Ashraf warned Safa'i-Farahani that Iraj Nayyeri, their liaison person, was compromised and was likely to be arrested.²⁹

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At the time of this meeting, Iraj Nayyeri had already been arrested. News of Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi's arrest must have seriously rattled Ashraf and Safa'i-Farahani. Rahimi-Meschi and Iraj Nayyeri had been in regular contact with the mountain team, knew their whereabouts, and were knowledgeable about the food stores in the mountains.

Safa'i-Farahani's impression of Ashraf during this last meeting before the assault on Siyahkal was that he was no longer opposed to launching the operations. When Safa'i-Farahani commented that nothing could be done in Tehran, Ashraf pensively responded that "the situation is unclear and I have no categorical response."³⁰

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Ashraf gave his reserved consent to the commencement of the Siyahkal strike, yet given the way the events had been unfolding since mid-December, he must have braced himself for eventually having to rebuild the Group from scratch.

Notes

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Hasanpour, p. 169.

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Mehdi Same‘, personal interview, 13 September 2018, Paris.

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Ettela‘at, 2 Dey 1349.

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Ettela‘at, 7 Dey 1349.

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Majid Yousefi, Tarikh Irani,
[http://tarikhirani.ir/Modules/News/Phtml/News.PrintVersion.Html.php?
Lang=fa&TypeId=30&NewsId=4924](http://tarikhirani.ir/Modules/News/Phtml/News.PrintVersion.Html.php?Lang=fa&TypeId=30&NewsId=4924)

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(retrieved 25 February 2019).

[6](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 2, p. 119.

[7](#)

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Keyhan, 26, 27 Dey 1350.

[8](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 182.

[9](#)

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Salehi, Esm-e shab, Siyahkal, pp. 258, 262; Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 30–33.

[10](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 178.

[11](#)

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Salehi, Esm-e shab, Siyahkal, p. 270.

[12](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, pp. 171–173. According to this document, the information provided is based on the content of pages 4, 10, 12, and 13 of Hasanpour's interrogations.

[13](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 415–417; Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 30.

[14](#)

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Hasanpour, pp. 293, 168–172.

[15](#)

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Same', personal interview and correspondence, 13 September 2018 and 1 March 2019.

[16](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 294.

[17](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 294.

[18](#)

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The account of Same‘’s torture is based on Same‘, personal interview and correspondence, 13 September 2018 and 1 March 2019.

[19](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 416–417.

[20](#)

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L. Meysami, *Az nehzat-e azadi ta mojahedin*, vol. 1, Tehran: Nashr-e samadiyeh, n.d., p. 380.

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Jamshid Taheripour, Rouydad Siahkal, na baleghi-e khod khasteh, http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/taheripour_4.pdf

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(retrieved 20 July 2018).

[23](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 415–417.

[24](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 30; Rowhani, pp. 415–417.

[25](#)

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, p. 15.

[26](#)

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Salehi, Esm-e shab, Siyahkal, pp. 251–252; Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 61–62.

[27](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation reports.

[28](#)

▪

Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 254. 'Abbas Meftahi's interrogation reports.

[29](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 16; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897.

[30](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 897. Safa'i-Farahani's interrogation report.

The Siyahkal Operation

On Thursday, 4 February 1971, Iraj Nayyeri left his school (Edalat) at Shabkhoslat (Shaqouzlat) earlier than usual and went strolling in Siyahkal's open market. Later that day, he was arrested by Mohammad-Hasan Naseri (alias Azodi) and Bahman Naderipour (alias Tehrani). Based on Bahman Naderipour's confessions at his trial, both men were sent to Siyahkal from Tehran to arrest a few people. Naderipour recalled that Naseri, an expert interrogator, led their team.¹

Iraj Nayyeri was taken to SAVAK headquarters in Rasht and was tortured to obtain information about his activities.²

Two days before Iraj Nayyeri's arrest, on Tuesday, 2 February 1971, Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi, another key liaison person of the mountain team, was arrested by Azodi and Tehrani. Rahimi-Meschi was a teacher stationed near Fouman, some sixty kilometres away from Siyahkal. He, too, was tortured and dispatched to Tehran on Friday, 5 February 1971.³

Iraj Nayyeri had played three important roles in relation to the mountain team. He had been the inside person, providing detailed geographical and topographical information about the layout of Siyahkal and the location of its key government buildings. The guerrillas' knowledge of the whereabouts of the

gendarmerie station, the Forest Guard Headquarters, and the Telephone and Telegraph Office was based on Nayyeri's information. Nayyeri had also been involved in constructing food stores and depots in and around Kakouh. But most importantly perhaps, he had been the respected and liked local teacher who could act as a bridge between the locals and the revolutionaries during the assault.

The day after Ashraf voiced concern about Iraj Nayyeri's safety, the mountain team dispatched Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, who knew the area very well, to check on Iraj Nayyeri. At around 19:00 on Saturday, 6 February 1971, Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi made his way to the village of Shabkhoslat, some three kilometres from Siyahkal, where Nayyeri taught and lived. Nayyeri's landlord informed Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi that the village teacher had gone to Lahijan on Thursday and had not returned since. The mountain team concluded that since Sunday was a national holiday, for the sacrificial festivities associated with 10 Zihajjeh (eyd-e qorban), Nayyeri must have skipped Saturday and would return to his school on Monday.⁴

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By the time Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi had begun looking for Nayyeri, the latter had already been tortured in Rasht, and transferred to Qezelqaleh prison in Tehran.

On Monday, 8 February 1971, Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi was instructed to go back to the village of Shabkhoslat, and to accompany Iraj Nayyeri to the mountain team's campsite. At 15:00, Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi along with Houshang Nayyeri (Iraj's cousin) and Jalil Enferadi left their camp and headed towards Iraj Nayyeri's house. After an hour's walk, they arrived at the Lounak-Siyahkal road. Jalil Enferadi and Houshang Nayyeri stood by the road, while Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi headed towards his destination.

At around 17:00, as darkness fell, Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi arrived at Shabkhoslat. He enquired about the whereabouts of Iraj Nayyeri and walked towards his school. Suddenly, he was confronted by two villagers intent on arresting him. According to one account, Nasrollah Taleshpour and Ghaffar Qadimi were instrumental in his arrest.⁵

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Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi shot twice in the air to push back his assailants and

tried to escape. However, incapable of shooting at the villagers, he was overwhelmed, subdued, beaten up, and tied up. The authorities had warned the villagers to be vigilant as newcomers may be saboteurs and communists. Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi was handed over to Corporal Karim Sadeqi, the commander of Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station, who initially escorted him to the Siyahkal Station, and subsequently transported him to Lahijan. By around 21:00, Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, along with his equipment, arms, and ammunition, was at SAVAK headquarters in Rasht.⁶

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On Attarpour's instruction, he was immediately sent to Tehran, and his interrogation and torture began at around 02:00 early Tuesday morning.⁷

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It must have been around 17:00 on Monday, 8 February 1971 that the mountain team decided to move out of their camp and begin its operations. It was becoming increasingly anxious about its missing liaison people, Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi and Iraj Nayyeri. Feeling as though the regime was closing in on them, the mountain team concluded that if they did not act immediately, they might never have the chance to launch the armed struggle. It is suggested that, concerned with Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi's tardy return, the mountain team set out on its mission ahead of schedule.⁸

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The decision to attack must have been based on a combination of these factors.

Ashraf, however, implies that the date previously set for the attack, irrespective of the complications that occurred, had been 8 February 1971.⁹

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The team was composed of Safai'e-Farahani, the commander of the team, Ahmad Farhoudi, second in command, 'Abbas Danesh-Behzadi, Mohammad-'Ali Mohaddes-Qandchi, Rahim Sama'i, and Mehdi Eshaqi. The team left their base at Balaroud, some twelve kilometres south-east of Siyahkal, and joined Houshang Nayyeri and Jalil Enferadi at around 17:30 on the road connecting Deylaman to Lounak and Siyahkal.

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Assault on the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station on 19 Bahman

On the road from Lounak to Siyahkal, the mountain team of eight seized a Ford minibus and forced out the passengers (two adult men, one woman, and two children), the driver, and his assistant. They tied the hands of the four men to the trees, and left the two children and the woman free under the watch of Mohaddes-Qandchi. The other seven members drove to Siyahkal with Farhoudi at the wheel. They were hopeful that they would locate Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, and free him should he be a captive.

The mission at Siyahkal was three-fold. The team had planned to attack the gendarmerie station, disarm everyone, and blow up the building. They also intended to attack the Forest Guard Headquarters (jangalbani). Finally, they aimed to capitalize on their military operation to publicize the political objectives of the Group by distributing handwritten leaflets. The message in the leaflets invited “compatriots, brothers and sisters” to set aside their silence, rise, and overthrow the unjust and despotic system through “a long and arduous armed struggle”. It invited “workers, peasants and intellectuals” to participate in this armed struggle. The leaflets publicized the birth of a new political force, “Iran’s Revolutionary Armed Movement”.¹⁰

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At around 20:00, the seven-man team entered Siyahkal, a village of some two thousand inhabitants, with one main street and two banks.¹¹

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They first dropped off Sama‘i and Eshaqi in front of the Forest Guard Headquarters, a short distance from the gendarmerie station. Sama‘i and Eshaqi were instructed to wait twenty minutes until they heard the explosion of the gendarmerie station. The sound of the detonation was to be their cue to attack the Forest Guard, disarm everyone, and blow up the minibus which belonged to it.¹²

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To this day, the interrogation reports of Safai'e-Farahani, Houshang Nayyeri, Danesh-Behzadi, Farhoudi, and Enferadi have not been made public in their entirety, and important details are missing on events at the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station. Reconstruction of the events may be incomplete, and even flawed, as it relies on bits and pieces of disjointed information appearing in works published by non-scholarly and partisan sources with access to SAVAK files. The interrogation reports published by government sources are most often selectively chosen, redacted, and doctored, serving preconceived political purposes. From the participants in the attack, no one survived. With this important caveat in mind, here is an attempt at reconstructing the events.

The five-man team responsible for the attack had studied the detailed plan of the building provided to them by Iraj Nayyeri and had been briefed on their individual responsibilities. They drove up to the two-storied building and walked up to the entrance. Kadkhodazadeh, the soldier on guard, tried to stop Safa'i-Farahani from entering the building but Danesh-Behzadi knocked him out with a blow of his rifle butt, and Farhoudi dashed to the dormitory, securing it by subduing one soldier and two civilians.

Safa'i-Farahani rushed up to the first floor, while Houshang Nayyeri stood guard in the hallway on the ground floor. On the first floor, Safai'e-Farahani stormed the relatively spacious main office. Corporal Ya'qoub Tajbakhsh (Aqa-Kouchaki), the second in command at the gendarmerie station, and Corporal Esma'il Rahmatpour, in charge of Conscription Affairs, were the occupants of this room. Akbar Vahdati, a civilian and head of the "House of Justice" (khaneh-e ensaf) at Leysh, a nearby village, and another civilian, Shafi'i, the chief (kadkhoda) of Siyahkal village were also there visiting. The four men were busy discussing events of the day, and the arrest of Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, when they saw the soldier on guard being attacked.¹³

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What exactly happened next is not clear. It is most probable that, as Safa'i-Farahani entered the main office, a brawl took place between him and the others. Outnumbered, Safa'i-Farahani opened fire, slightly injuring Vahdati and Corporal Tajbakhsh, but gravely wounding Corporal Rahmatpour, who died later in hospital. Having heard the shots, and concerned about the safety of his comrade, Houshang Nayyeri rushed upstairs, and entered the main office. The story of what happened next is rather muddled.

According to one account, as Houshang Nayyeri entered unannounced, Safa'i-Farahani fired suspecting the intruder of being a gendarme. His shooting injured Nayyeri's left arm. It is reported that although Houshang Nayyeri was shot twice, he was, nevertheless, able to release Safa'i-Farahani from the clutches of an assailant, who was trying to choke him. Nayyeri is reported to have struck Safa'i-Farahani's aggressor, probably Rahmatpour, on the head with the butt of his machine gun. It is also possible that the rescue of Safa'i-Farahani occurred before Nayyeri was shot. The interrogation reports of guerrillas confirm that Safa'i-Farahani accidentally shot Nayyeri. However, Houshang Nayyeri may have been caught in the crossfire between the military personnel and Safa'i-Farahani after he entered the room and rescued Safa'i-Farahani.¹⁴

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Enferadi's role was to enter the armoury, seize weapons and ammunition, and transport everything to their vehicle. But for some unknown reason, by the time Safa'i-Farahani and Nayyeri came down to the ground floor, Enferadi had not fulfilled his task. Safa'i-Farahani helped Enferadi break down the armoury door and carry the weapons to their Ford minibus. The guerrillas walked away with eight semi-automatic M-1 rifles and two Carabine machine guns.¹⁵

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The members of the team huddled in the minibus to get away quickly, but the vehicle would not start. In the end, they had to push the vehicle for it to start, all the while surrounded by the villagers. According to Corporal Tajbakhsh, it was the villagers who helped them push their vehicle until it finally started.¹⁶

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According to another report, the guerrillas had felt threatened by the villagers around them and had warned them not to approach the vehicle.¹⁷

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Based on a third account, the villagers did not go close to the vehicle and the guerrillas did not have to warn them.¹⁸

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The guerrillas stopped on the way to pick up Rahim Sama'i and Mehdi Eshaqi, and drove away until the vehicle stalled again, and came to a complete stop. The team abandoned the broken-down minibus and walked south on the Siyahkal-Lounak road to where they had left the minibus driver and passengers. It was

about 23:30 when they got there. They paid the driver 100 tomans for the damage done to his abandoned vehicle, apologized to the passengers for detaining them, picked up Mohaddes-Qandchi, and rushed away from the scene.¹⁹

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The aftermath of the assault

The non-existent preparedness and resistance at the gendarmerie station should have enabled the team to successfully fulfil all its objectives. The ease with which the outpost was overrun, although SAVAK had been informed about the imminent activities of the guerrillas in the region, demonstrated major flaws in the Shah's security, military, and intelligence organizations. The guerrillas, in turn, failed to capitalize on the regime's ineptitude. Houshang Nayyeri's injury threw the mountain team off guard, forcing them into a series of rushed decisions and blunders, compromising the success of their operation.

In the confusion that followed the shooting, the mountain team abandoned not only the idea of blowing up the gendarmerie station, but also the idea of attacking the Forest Guard Headquarters and disarming it. Furthermore, in the commotion that surrounded their departure, the guerrillas left behind the ammunition for the weapons they had confiscated, rendering their precious booty unusable. They also left behind two essential items, the explosives that they had brought with them to blow up the gendarmerie station and the propaganda leaflets informing the people of the birth of their vanguard organization.²⁰

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On Tuesday, 9 February, those who read the morning newspaper Keyhan were informed that a group of unidentified armed men had attacked Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station. Keyhan reported that on the previous afternoon, one armed person had been arrested, and three armed men seeking the release of their

captured friend had entered the gendarmerie station at Siyahkal, shot at the gendarmes, and had escaped back into the mountains.²¹

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While murmurs of an armed attack on the gendarmerie station were circulating in Tehran, the locals living in the vicinity of Siyahkal, Lahijan (some twenty kilometres from Siyahkal), and Rasht witnessed a perceptible militarization of their whereabouts. One day after the assault on Siyahkal, regular troops and specialized paratroopers began pouring into the area. In response to a request from General Gholam-‘Ali Oveysi, the Shah ordered the dispatch of three helicopters, eighty highly trained personnel, and two officers to Rasht. At 08:00 on Thursday, 10 February, a committee composed of three senior officers met in Rasht to “review the method of hunting down the bandits”.

From noon on 10 February, well-equipped search teams began chasing and hunting down the outlaws.²²

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At Siyahkal, the health centre and the gendarmerie station were converted into a search and hunt-down outpost. The operation was under the command of Colonel Hoseyn Baba’i-Pirouz, the Commander of the Gilan Battalion. Colonel Baba’i-Pirouz had some two hundred soldiers along with numerous local scouts and personnel at his command. The soldiers at his disposition included elite “special airborne forces” (havanirooz), as well as Marine Forces from the Manjil base in Gilan, some eighty kilometres away from Siyahkal.²³

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By 11 February, the military authorities had summoned all village-level officials and notables. They were instructed to report immediately to the authorities any unusual incident or sighting of strangers in the area. They were ordered to cooperate with the military personnel and to report all information that may assist in arresting the fugitives. Finally, the village authorities were told that it was illegal to shelter or help the bandits, and that aiding and abetting them was punishable by law.²⁴

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By Wednesday, 9 February, a security perimeter had been established around the forest and mountainous areas to close off all escape routes. The military was trying to guess the escape route the guerrillas were to take. The guerrillas had

taken the Siyahkal-Lounak road going south and had then moved east into the forest region. They could have gone to Deylaman, situated south of Siyahkal, or to Lahijan and Langaroud, north-east of Siyahkal. There was also the possibility of heading towards Amlash, and Roudsar to the east of Siyahkal. Or else, they might have moved deep south-east, towards Jawaher Dasht, crossing Gilan into Mazandaran, and making their way towards Ramsar.

The military knew that one guerrilla had been wounded, compelling the group to seek medical assistance. The military also knew that a considerable number of food storage depots had been discovered and emptied by government troops, forcing the guerrillas to solicit nourishment from villagers. Trekking in heavy snowfall on an empty stomach would slow them down. For the retreating guerrillas, it was almost impossible to roam around the forest and mountainous areas until spring. They were surrounded by the army, almost out of food, and compelled to move around with a wounded comrade in poor weather conditions. Cut off from their urban bases after the arrest of their liaison persons, the guerrillas were left on their own. With the promise of financial rewards made to local collaborators, the military were able to secure scouts who knew the inaccessible terrain. In view of the extraordinary concentration of forces in the region, the military were well equipped to hunt down eight guerrillas.

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The nineteen-day odyssey of the retreating guerrillas

In the early hours of Tuesday, 9 February, the eight-man mountain team hid five guns and a machine gun, ate their late dinner, and left the Siyahkal–Lounak main road. They went back into the forest, making their way through the mountainous region of Kakouh towards its peak, south-east of Siyahkal. The team walked all night and until noon of 9 February. They found shelter in a columb, a local term for sheds which are built to shelter cows and sometimes horses. Farmers usually built a shed close to their homes in the village, and one in the forest and mountainous areas where they took their cattle to graze during the summer.

These sheds were usually abandoned during the winter. The guerrillas spent twenty hours resting in one of these cowsheds and started their walk towards Kakouh on Wednesday, 10 February around noon.

From the early hours of Tuesday, 9 February, a heavy snowfall had begun. The snow slowed down the guerrillas as did exhaustion and hunger. Helicopters started buzzing over their heads from Wednesday. Team members searched for food storage depots and were distressed to find them ransacked by the authorities. The arrest of Rahimi-Meschi and Iraj Nayyeri was taking its toll. In the early afternoon hours of 10 February, the team found itself stranded in the snow-covered mountains. While the military forces were patrolling the area, the mountain team was on the move, walking and resting at cowsheds along the way as they pushed towards Kakouh. Neither the guerrillas nor the army seemed to have the slightest clue of the whereabouts of the other. The guerrillas did not seem to have a clear plan for their retreat. Their subsequent movements and activities demonstrated improvisation and a series of spur-of-the-moment decisions aimed at simply surviving.

According to Mohaddes-Qandchi, the team was aiming to move towards Javaher Dasht, some sixty-two kilometres south-east.²⁵

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This may have been the initial plan, but it was quickly revised, and the team ended up moving east and then north from Kakouh, towards villages close to Lahijan. Farhoudi, however, later claimed that in the absence of a predetermined plan or itinerary, the team had been wandering around Kakouh.²⁶

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The mountain team, in particular Sama'i, Houshang Nayyeri, and Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, were very familiar with Kakouh and its vicinity. The course of action taken by the guerrillas supports Farhoudi's claim. One could surmise that the prime objective of the team was to avoid being arrested, and to ensure survival in a most inhospitable and threatening environment.

After some nine days, the mountain team reached the elevations of Kakouh. The team spent at least four out of these nine days resting and regaining their strength. At Kakouh, the guerrillas began searching for the food depots previously stored in the area. A few months back, in the spring and summer of 1970, Sama'i had replenished the food depots. He was eventually able to find

one undetected food store containing canned tuna, sugar, rice, and salt. With helicopters hovering above them, and snow almost up to their chests, they used the trees as camouflage while they ate.²⁷

▪

On Thursday, 18 February, Safa'i-Farahani decided to split up the group. Two accounts exist explaining his decision. One suggests that Houshang Nayyeri's wound needed serious attention, and getting him to a doctor in the closest city, presumably Lahijan, became a priority.²⁸

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According to a second account, Safa'i-Farahani led a scout team of three guerrillas away from their camp at Kakouh towards the east, looking for a safe route to lead his team to a secure refuge.²⁹

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Ten days after the assault on Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station, Safa'i-Farahani left behind the camp at Kakouh and five of his comrades. He began his trek at around 15:00 accompanied by Houshang Nayyeri and Jalil Enferadi. Earlier on the same day, the Commander-in-Chief of Iran's gendarmerie, General Gholam-'Ali Oveysi, had sent an important telegram to the operation centre in Lahijan. Oveysi was under growing pressure from the Shah, who was increasingly exasperated with the inability of his military and security machine to locate and neutralize a handful of guerrillas.

General Oveysi's instructions were clear. In every village, an informant had to be paid or induced to report on all comings and goings in his territory. Villagers cooperating fully with government forces had to be rewarded materially. Oveysi warned the military that the Shah was losing patience and had ordered that "those who had attacked the military station be killed or arrested promptly". Oveysi threatened Colonel Baba'i-Pirouz that if results were not forthcoming, he and others would be "harshly punished".³⁰

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Safa'i-Farahani's team of three began its descent towards the east. After some three hours of walking, they heard gun shots and worried about the safety of their comrades at the peak of Kakouh. Safa'i-Farahani suggested finding a place to dry their clothes, eat, and head back to where they had left the others.³¹

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The team followed cattle and human tracks they found in the snow. Around 18:30, the night had fallen when they approached a hamlet. They asked for food and offered to pay for it, but to their surprise, the villagers refused. They claimed that they had no food and could not let them in their houses as the men of each household were away.

The villagers directed the guerrillas to another close-by hamlet called Kolestan or Kelastoon, one kilometre to the south of Lahijan.³²

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In Kolestan, a household agreed to feed and shelter the guerrillas, on the condition that they hand over their identity cards.³³

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The three guerrillas entered the house, dried their clothes and shoes, and ate rice, bread, milk, and tea. While the guerrillas were eating and feeling comfortable, a string of villagers entered the room under the pretext that a traditional Thursday night gathering had previously been planned at this house.

The three guerrillas seemed impervious to the strange excuse given for the growing number of villagers in the room. At around 23:00, as they got up to leave, the villagers assailed them. The guerrillas were completely outwitted by the villagers. Houshang Nayyeri and Jalil Enferadi fired their pistols, injuring two of the villagers, but after a short scuffle, the three guerrillas were subdued. They were beaten and tied up tightly with ropes. The villagers emptied their pockets and confiscated their money, arms, ammunition, and notebooks. By late Thursday night of 18 February 1971, four of the original nine-man guerrilla team, including Bandekkhoda-Langaroudi, were arrested and disarmed by local villagers. At 11:30 on Friday, 19 February, the three captured guerrillas were sent first to Siyahkal, then to Rasht, for interrogation.³⁴

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Strangely, Safa'i-Farahani and his men had completely failed to suspect the villagers' intention, and they had not reacted to the alarming situation simmering around them. It is not clear what blunted their sense of survival. Throwing alertness and caution to the wind, Safa'i-Farahani and his comrades seemed to have dropped their guard and forgotten the famous dictum circulating among revolutionaries that, at first encounter, villagers were never to be trusted. Furthermore, they failed to leave at least one person on guard, while the others

were eating. The guerrillas should have known that ten days after their assault, all surrounding villages were not only warned of their presence, but had been also cajoled, threatened, and even bribed to inform on them, and capture them. The guerrillas must have known that they were only some fifteen kilometres away from Siyahkal, and well within the perimeter set by the military to hunt them.

Back at Kakouh on Thursday, 18 February, some two and a half hours after Safa'i-Farahani and his team left their camp, Mohaddes-Qandchi was standing guard. Mohaddes-Qandchi informed his comrades that a local villager was approaching their hideout. The village chief of Balaroud, guiding a military column, had been tracking the footprints of the guerrillas for close to nine hours. To identify the advancing individual, Danesh-Behzadi moved towards him. As soon as he saw the column of gendarmes behind him, he ran back to warn that the military were approaching. At this time, the military unit under the command of Captain Aslani opened fire and the guerrillas fired back.³⁵

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This was the exchange of fire that Safa'i-Farahani and his team heard around 18:30, while climbing down Kakouh towards Kolestan, where they were captured. At some point, Mohaddes-Qandchi abandoned his position, handed over his machine gun to Farhoudi, and amid bullets flying overhead, took flight down the mountain. The remaining four guerrillas, Sama'i, Farhoudi, Danesh-Behzadi, and Eshaqi, took cover behind a rock. The crossfire continued into the dark. The guerrillas slipped into a cave nearby and gradually a thick fog began to cover the area.³⁶

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In the meantime, Captain Aslani sent three local messengers to headquarters informing his superiors that he had located the guerrillas, who had taken refuge in a cave. Aslani reported that his forces were engaged in a battle and that the guerrillas had been surrounded. Once the message reached headquarters, reinforcements were sent to the area under the command of Captain Atashi. On Friday morning, 19 February, helicopters were sent to the scene of operations, with launch grenades, tear gas, 50-calibre heavy machine guns, and light cannons.³⁷

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The top brass conducting the search and hunt campaign was getting nervous and

demanded quick results. Once again, Colonel Baba'i-Pirouz was threatened with immediate court-martial if the "saboteurs" were not killed or arrested. However, he was also reassured that, if he were successful in his mission, he would "receive substantial enticements and rewards".³⁸

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In the cave, the four remaining guerrillas ate some canned tuna and sugar and discussed their next move. The idea of returning to the city and hiding was categorically rejected by Sama'i who was in favour of continuing the fight. Under the cover of darkness and the thick mountain fog, the four managed to slip through the encirclement cordon. Early the next morning, on Friday, 19 February, when Captain Aslani moved his troops against the guerrilla positions he found no sign of them. All that was found were backpacks, sleeping bags, clothing, food, compasses, maps, explosives, and Danesh-Behzadi's diary, which he had kept throughout his short mountain expedition.³⁹

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The impressive reinforcement that arrived on Friday morning under the command of Captain Atashi proved to be of no use. This new development further enraged the top brass. Colonel Baba'i-Pirouz and Captain Aslani were accused of "incompetence and negligence", threatened with court-martial and an "exemplary punishment" which would set an example for future military commanders. Their soldiers were mocked as less effective than the rural women who had successfully participated in arresting the guerrillas.⁴⁰

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From early Friday morning until late at night, reconnaissance helicopters were buzzing overhead, while Sama'i, Farhoudi, Danesh-Behzadi, and Eshaqi hid motionless under a bush. At night, the four walked down the mountain. They had depleted their food reserves and had slept some two hours on an empty stomach. Fatigue, cold, hunger, and disorientation began plaguing them. On Saturday morning, 20 February, without a compass or a map, they walked to a village called Tousaposht (Tousagoudasht or Touskadasht) in the Gomol region and located some five kilometres south of Lahijan. Around 11:30, while seeking to buy food and supplies, an old villager agreed to host them. He fed them milk, bread, cheese, and tea. Taking precautions, two guerrillas stood guard while the other two ate, and then they exchanged places. Having recovered their energy, the four left the village and crossed a valley.⁴¹

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Meanwhile, the villagers of Tousaposht had informed the gendarmerie of the presence of strangers. Ten minutes after the departure of the guerrillas, the gendarmes arrived on the scene. With the help of the villagers, they quickly located the whereabouts of the guerrillas. While on their way towards Lahijan, the guerrillas came under a first round of fire. Under heavy fire, the four found refuge in a grove of box trees where they were well camouflaged. Soon a helicopter, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ebrahimi, brought in reinforcements and completed the encirclement of the guerrillas from three sides. As night fell, the military fired on the guerrillas with 60 mm mortars, M62 light machine guns, and Brno rifles. During the exchange of fire that ensued Sama'i shot a corporal and attempted to recover his ammunition. In the process, he was shot at and was wounded in the neck and thigh. The government forces wished to keep an eye on the encircled guerrillas and shot flares to illuminate the sky, providing them with perfect visibility.⁴²

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Taking advantage of the flares, the four guerrillas slipped out of the encirclement net. They evaded the troops and walked towards the mountain ridge. That night, the group took shelter in a shed and rested. They resumed their march on the evening of Sunday, 21 February 1971.⁴³

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Around 20:00, they identified a dim light coming from a hut located below the Gomol region. Even though Sama'i (alias Mostafa) had lost blood and was exhausted, he walked in front of the column with Eshaqi (alias Bahman), Farhoudi (alias Sattar), and Danesh-Behzadi (alias Behrooz) following behind. Within twenty to thirty metres of the hut, in pitch darkness, a voice ordered them to halt and asked for the checkpoint password of that night. Sama'i responded that they did not know the password. Within minutes, they came under heavy fire. Sama'i and Eshaqi were shot and killed.⁴⁴

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Two accounts exist as to what happened after Sama'i informed the soldiers that he did not know the checkpoint password. According to one account, a soldier ordered Sama'i to introduce himself. Sama'i informed him that he and his men were the ones who had been surrounded before, and they wished to surrender. Misunderstanding Sama'i's offer, and having heard a reference to the word surrounded, a voice from inside the hut yelled out, "Colonel we have been surrounded." The soldier's announcement was followed by shots fired at the

guerrillas. In the middle of the confusion, while bullets flew, the guerrillas were ordered to put up their hands and come forward. Sama'i followed the instructions and started walking backwards towards the soldiers. After a few steps, he was gunned down and killed. Faced with the death of Sama'i, his cousin Eshaqi opened fire on the soldiers, supposedly screaming, "We want to surrender, why are you firing at us?" As the crossfire continued, Eshaqi was the next to fall.⁴⁵

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The two cousins were killed minutes apart.

According to a second account, while Sama'i was walking towards the soldiers with his back to them, he held a grenade in his hand, and when he was about to throw it at the soldiers, the soldiers opened fire, killing him. Either concurrent with Sama'i's last attempt or subsequent to his death, both Eshaqi and Farhoudi fired at the soldiers. In the gun battle that ensued, Eshaqi was killed and Farhoudi was injured.⁴⁶

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While retreating, Farhoudi fell into a pit and passed out. Danesh-Behzadi was the only one who managed to escape that infernal night.⁴⁷

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The next morning, Monday, 22 February, the troops exited cautiously the huts from where they had been shooting to pursue the guerrillas. In a pit close by they found Farhoudi half-conscious, and arrested him.⁴⁸

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On the run, Danesh-Behzadi found his way to a stream and walked in it with great difficulty. At around 05:00, too cold and too exhausted to crawl through the nettles, he fell asleep on a raspberry bush. At around 06:10, he woke up, threw away his weapon and his torn overcoat, washed his face and made his way to a road. He asked a motorcyclist to give him a ride to Lahijan. Suspicious of Danesh-Behzadi, the motorcyclist reported him to the gendarmes who were amply present in the area. Along the road, a sergeant approached Danesh-Behzadi and ordered him to put his hands in the air. Danesh-Behzadi was in no condition to resist and was subsequently arrested. By Monday morning, the last of the four-man team had been apprehended.

By Monday, 22 February, Mohaddes-Qandchi was the only member of the original nine-man team still at large. He had escaped from Kakouh when his five-man squad had come under attack on Thursday, 18 February. Mohaddes-Qandchi demonstrated exceptional stamina, spending nine days hiding in the bushes, drinking water from streams, and eating herbs and shrubs. On the ninth day of his escape, Mohaddes-Qandchi, completely exhausted and famished, tried to obtain some food from one of the villages in the Eshkal region. Eshkal was some fourteen kilometres away from the city of Lahijan, and some sixteen kilometres away from Siyahkal. On 27 February 1971, in Eshkal, Mohaddes-Qandchi approached a villager for food. This was reported to the gendarmes and he was arrested. He had a pistol and nineteen rounds of ammunition with him.⁴⁹

▪

Nineteen days after the mountain team launched the assault on Siyahkal, they were completely dismantled and crushed. From the nine-man guerrilla squad, two had been killed and seven had been arrested.

In the clashes that took place during these nineteen days, five enlisted corporals and one civilian cooperating with the soldiers were killed. Two officers, five corporals, and three civilians were wounded. When General Oveysi presented his final report on the operations against the guerrillas, the Shah enquired, “How could such a small number inflict such casualties on us? Were they better positioned, more effective in their attacks or were we caught by surprise?”⁵⁰

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Notes

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Hasanpour, p. 171.

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Salehi, Esm-e shab, Siyahkal, pp. 271–273. In his interview with Salehi, Nayyeri refers to Thursday, 14 Bahman as the day of his arrest. Thursday was the 15th of Bahman not the 14th; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 36.

3

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Hasanpour, p. 171; Iraj Nayyeri, Akbar Rooz ; <http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=78191>

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(retrieved 20 July 2018).

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 190–191. Bandekkhoda-Langaroudi’s interrogation reports.

[5](#)

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Fatemeh 'Aliasghar, Pa be pay-e cherikha, Tarikh Irani,
[http://www.tarikhirani.ir/Modules/files/Phtml/files.PrintVersion.Html.php?
Lang=fa&TypeId=72&filesId=750](http://www.tarikhirani.ir/Modules/files/Phtml/files.PrintVersion.Html.php?Lang=fa&TypeId=72&filesId=750)

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(retrieved 29 December 2018).

[6](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 191–192. Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi's interrogation reports;
Rowhani, pp. 417-418. Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi's interrogation reports; Tarikh
Irani, interview with Ya'qoub Tajbaksh (Aqa-Kouchaki),
<http://www.tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/4941/%20target=>

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(retrieved 17 September 2018); Hasanpour, p. 173.

[7](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 172.

[8](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 173; Bahman Qobadi maintains that Safa'i-Farahani planned to
carry out his military operation in spring 1971, but Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi's
arrest precipitated the attack; Qobadi, chapter one (Bahman), p. 28.

9

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 17.

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Rowhani, pp. 418–420; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 238; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 198.

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I am grateful to Iraj Nayyeri for providing me with the information on Siyahkal’s population at the time.

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 193–194. Mohaddes-Qandchi’s interrogation reports.

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Rowhani, p. 419; Tarikh Irani, interview with Ya‘qoub Tajbaksh (Aqa-Kouchaki), <http://www.tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/4941/%20target=>

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(retrieved 17 September 2018). Also see a very different account by Ya‘qoub Aqa-Kouchaki, in Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 196–197.

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Rowhani, p. 419; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 194–195; Tarikh Irani, interview with Ya‘qoub Tajbaksh (Aqa-Kouchaki), <http://www.tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/4941/%20target=>

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(retrieved 17 September 2018); Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 238.

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Rowhani, p. 419; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 195.

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Tarikh Irani, interview with Ya‘qoub Tajbaksh (Aqa-Kouchaki), <http://www.tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/4941/%20target=>

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(retrieved 17 September 2018).

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 197. Naderi does not give a reference to an interrogation report for his contention.

[18](#)

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Rowhani, p. 420; Enferadi's interrogation reports.

[19](#)

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Rowhani, p. 421; Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 238. Mohaddes-Qandchi's interrogation reports.

[20](#)

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Rowhani, p. 419.

[21](#)

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Keyhan, 20 Bahman 1349. Keyhan's rival newspaper, Ettela'at, failed to report on the event.

[22](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 199.

[23](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 220; Tarikh Irani, interview with Ya‘qoub Tajbaksh (Aqa-Kouchaki), <http://www.tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/30/bodyView/4941/%20target=>

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(retrieved 17 September 2018).

[24](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 200.

[25](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, Tabestan 1396, p. 238. Mohaddes-Qandchi’s interrogation reports. Naderi erroneously maintains that they reached Javaher-dasht, see Naderi, vol. 1, p. 201.

[26](#)

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Rowhani, p. 421.

[27](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 200–201.

[28](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 201. Danesh-Behzadi's interrogation reports.

[29](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 423, 424, 1131. Enferadi's interrogation reports.

[30](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 204–205.

[31](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 423, 424, 1131. Enferadi's interrogation reports.

[32](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 203, Naderi erroneously identifies the village as Karafstan, but Karafstan is some ten kilometres away from Lahijan; Rowhani, p. 422.

[33](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 423, 424, 1131. Enferadi's interrogation reports.

[34](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 423, 424, 1131. Jalil Enferadi's interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 202–203.

[35](#)

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Rowhani, p. 426.

[36](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 208–209.

[37](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 209.

[38](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 209.

[39](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 425–426; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 210.

[40](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 211.

[41](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 211–212. Danesh-Behzadi’s interrogation reports; Rowhani, p. 428.

[42](#)

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Rowhani, pp. 427–430; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 212. Interrogation reports of Danesh-Behzadi and Farhoudi.

[43](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 900. Danesh-Behzadi’s interrogation report.

[44](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 229. Farhoudi’s interrogation reports.

[45](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 229. Farhoudi's interrogation reports.

[46](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 176. Danesh-Behzadi's interrogation reports; Naderi, vol. 1, p. 900. Danesh-Behzadi's interrogation reports.

[47](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 217.

[48](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 215–216; Rowhani, pp. 430–431. Farhoudi's interrogation reports.

[49](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 218. Mohaddes-Qandchi's interrogation reports.

[50](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 217.

Assessing the Siyahkal Strike

The place and importance of the Siyahkal strike has been subject to different, and at times conflicting, analyses and judgements. During the Pahlavi era, opinion on its political significance was divided. On one side, the supporters of the Shah's regime denounced the attack as unpatriotic. The Shah took time to make his position known. Two months after the assault, he dismissed Siyahkal as "a most vulgar, trivial, insane, and suicidal act" led by "ignorant people, manipulated by foreigners, and influenced by a couple of movies". Ridiculing the Siyahkal assault, the Shah observed that "the aides to the cooks of the Iranian army would have sufficed to deal with these elements."¹

The Shah claimed that the "misguided" revolutionaries were very few in numbers, and their chance of doing damage to the country had been almost nil. He seemed dismayed at the restlessness and discontent brewing in what he considered to be a model state in the eyes of the international community. Acting as the crowned father of Iranians, he voiced deep concern about the "misguided" harming themselves and their families. He called on his countrymen to feel responsible for these "deviants". He urged the people to guide these misfits and, if need be, resist and confront them.²

The Tudeh Party's position was closer to the proponents of the regime than its opponents. The Tudeh Party dismissed the assault on Siyahkal as "an anti-Marxist and anarchist act contrary to the interests of the Iranian revolution".³

▪

It claimed that Siyahkal had been masterminded by “Maoists and anarchists” and that “this path delayed victory and led to defeat.” The Tudeh Party repeated its old position, that the objective and subjective conditions for armed struggle were absent in Iran, and therefore such activities were mere adventurism and doomed to failure.⁴

▪

On the other side of the debate stood the radical opposition to the Shah’s regime. To them, Siyahkal was a historical watershed, representing an audacious blow to the invincible aura of the Shah’s authoritarian power. The attack on Siyahkal had challenged submission, fear, and silence. Some six and a half years after Khomeyni’s 5 June uprising, a new flag had been raised.

The Maoist and anti-Castroist organ of the Toufan Party published overseas stated, “We bow before these brave and selfless young men.” Chastising the opponents of armed struggle, the Iranian Maoists opined that “this spark [Siyahkal] will undoubtedly lead to a burning flame that will thoroughly wash away the darkness and foulness of this regime.”⁵

▪

It should be noted that the Toufan Party had traditionally opposed the idea of armed struggle by a revolutionary intellectual vanguard, and had considered such attempts harmful to the creation of a popular communist movement and the creation of a communist party.⁶

▪

The nominal organ of the National Front, Bakhtar-e Emrooz, run by Mosaddeqists who had become independent Marxists, eulogized the event as “the Siyahkal Epic” (hamaseh-e Siyahkal), and lauded the revolutionaries as heroes (gahremanan). It wrote, “The recent struggle in Gilan has clearly demonstrated how a small and resolute group can paralyze a large number of government forces.”⁷

▪

Bakhtar-e Emrooz subsequently became a staunch proponent of the guerrilla movement in Iran, both Marxist and Islamic.

Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, Bahman Nirumand, and Majid Zarbakhsh were all

three members of the “Cadres of the Revolutionary Organization” who had seceded from the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party. They dedicated the first two issues of their new organ, Nabard, to singing the praises of the Siyahkal operation and of armed struggle in Iran.⁸

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Iranian Marxists of different tendencies, except for the Tudeh Party, rallied in support of the Siyahkal strike. It would be fair to say that, to all shades of the opposition, especially the youth and irrespective of their ideology, Siyahkal was a landmark political invitation to join revolutionary action. For the growing number of ‘Ali Shari‘ati’s students who had been trained in his modern, and radical Islamic ideology, Siyahkal presented the logical endgame of their master’s teaching. Arguably, Siyahkal even radicalized Shari‘ati, who was adept at sensing the mood change in his country and his audience.

In the defiant mood which prevailed, anti-Shah militants and circles did not openly oppose Siyahkal, lest their criticism would serve the regime’s cause. In private, however, there were militant and revolutionary groups, and Marxist–Leninist circles with serious criticisms of armed struggle and Siyahkal. The undeclared solidarity among anti-Shah militants prevented the surfacing of any official anti-Siyahkal position.⁹

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Objectives of the Siyahkal strike: Ahmadzadeh, Ashraf, Safa’i-Farahani

To shed more light on the success or failure of the Siyahkal strike, this event will be assessed from three perspectives. First, the outcome of Siyahkal in relation to the guerrillas’ expectations of this operation. Second, the military aspect of the assault in terms of its objectives, shortcomings, and results. Finally, the impact and ripple effects of the Siyahkal operation on Iranian polity and society.

For Ahmadzadeh and his group, Siyahkal was intended to illuminate the dark

political skies of the country. It was meant to be a tumultuous big bang “armed propaganda” operation, attracting attention to the cause of the armed struggle. Its primary objective was psychological, striking at the regime, not overthrowing it. It would be incorrect to assume that the masterminds and actors in the Siyahkal operation expected short-term miraculous military results. To them, this strike announced the military operations of a new brand of opposition. It was a clarion call to arms and combat, to be repeated over and over, until it gained national momentum.

Ahmadzadeh did not think of this mission as a military operation with the objective of agitating, mobilizing, and recruiting “the oppressed villagers”.¹⁰

▪

For the P-A-M Group, the most important task at hand was to begin the armed struggle. The reason they agreed to collaborate with the Siyahkal strike, despite their opposition to mountainous and rural armed operations, was that they saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate the path of armed struggle. For the P-A-M Group, Siyahkal was not intended as an armed operation to win a major military victory, but one which would deal a mighty political blow to the invincibility of the regime.¹¹

▪

After the Siyahkal strike, Ahmadzadeh insisted that they had not counted on the unconditional support of the people, nor had they expected them to revolt against the regime. For him and his group, the people were being represented by their vanguard, the intellectual revolutionaries, until the time when they would gradually join their vanguard.¹²

▪

Ahmadzadeh’s position after the Siyahkal strike was consistent with his assessment of the readiness of rural forces before the attack. Ahmadzadeh was convinced of the importance of launching armed struggle, although he was equally convinced of the rural population’s inability to help the revolutionaries.¹³

▪

In an emotionally charged statement, he wrote, “If we believe that the struggle will be a long one, and if we agree that the struggle needs to begin with an organized group, then the destruction of one group is of little import.” According to him, the defeat of one revolutionary group had no decisive impact on the

long-term outcome of the struggle.¹⁴

▪

Those who joined the ranks of the Fada'is were not misguided about the path before them and the sacrifices that were expected. Ahmadzadeh was not promising a light and smooth stroll through a rose garden.

Ashraf's view of the objectives and goals of the Siyahkal operation did not differ from those of Ahmadzadeh and the P-A-M Group. Writing after the Siyahkal strike, Ashraf argued that the objective of the Siyahkal "armed propaganda" operation had been to launch armed struggle and show the way to other combatant political organizations. Siyahkal was to put an end to the long-standing debate on whether to engage in armed struggle. For Ashraf, the operation at Siyahkal had also been about changing the country's political atmosphere.¹⁵

▪

In contrast to Ashraf and Ahmadzadeh, who shared the same broad expectations of the Siyahkal strike, Safa'i-Farahani is said to have viewed Siyahkal as almost the Iranian equivalent of the Cuban Sierra Maestra experience. It is said that Safa'i-Farahani considered Siyahkal as a guerrilla foco assault that would eventually attract the local population to the struggle.¹⁶

▪

Around 10 January 1971, about a month before the assault, Safa'i-Farahani had planned to move his men out of the conflict zone in Gilan, right after the attack. According to this original plan, he was to lead his men to the vicinity of Ramsar, where he would set up camp and train recruits from the P-A-M Group who were scheduled to join his team. Having equipped the new recruits with weapons confiscated from the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station, the plan was for them to move south, while continuing his campaign in Mazandaran. The fighters were subsequently to conduct a highly mobile campaign, regularly striking military targets throughout Gilan and Mazandaran. They were supposed to attack a target, then move away rapidly to avoid retaliation and encirclement by government forces. The mountain team hoped to conduct its long-term "armed propaganda", relying on food stores that had been created, and the support of a few local activists. According to Ashraf, this was an agreed upon plan of action.¹⁷

▪

But one week before the launching of the Siyahkal strike, Safa'i-Farahani had changed the objectives of the campaign, its strategies, and plans. He had suddenly decided not to move his men out of the Siyahkal region after the assault. Instead of moving far from the conflict zone, he had decided to keep his team in the area for a month. Right before the assault, Safa'i-Farahani had concluded that the Siyahkal operation was to have a local or regional impact rather than a national one. Consequently, after the assault, the mountain team remained in the region instead of swiftly leaving the area.¹⁸

▪

A year after Siyahkal, Ashraf criticized Safa'i-Farahani's decision as a "big strategic error" responsible for the defeat and destruction of the mountain team.¹⁹

▪

By deciding to stay in the region rather than moving out as swiftly as possible, Safa'i-Farahani had underestimated the regime's power and intensity of retaliation, and had exposed his men to hostile villagers and the military. It is difficult to speculate over the fate of Safa'i-Farahani's team had he kept to his original plan.

During his trial before a closed military tribunal, Safa'i-Farahani referred to the motivation and long-term objectives of those who had participated in the Siyahkal assault. He asked rhetorically, "Why did we go to the mountains, why did we think of establishing guerrilla cells, was it to overthrow the state?" His response to his own questions was in the negative. What had motivated them to take to the mountains had been the desire to "obtain rudimentary freedoms and [create] democratic conditions". They wished to create a political environment "within which all the people would benefit from the freedom of speech, criticism, and press".²⁰

▪

Safa'i-Farahani rejected charges of banditry and identified his sole motive for participating in the Siyahkal strike as political, to foster democratic conditions for the people of his country.²¹

▪

It is most unlikely that Safa'i-Farahani was downplaying his commitment to armed struggle to seek the mercy of his prosecutors. The trial must have been at the appellate court, and probably took a day or two at the most for all the thirteen

accused. Safa'i-Farahani spoke bluntly about the objectives of the Siyahkal operation, and told the military prosecutor, "Our objective was to initiate guerrilla wars and subsequently create a people's army."²²

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Siyahkal as a military operation: Fumbles and blunders

In military terms, the Siyahkal strike was botched-up, both in execution and during the retreat. The mission was composed of two parts: the strike at Siyahkal on 8 February and the retreat on 9 February. During the 8 February attack, the guerrillas faced no serious resistance and quickly obtained the upper hand by subduing and neutralizing the enemy. But five to eight minutes into the attack, Houshang Nayyeri was shot and wounded. From that point onwards, the operation began to slip.

A situation which had started out to the absolute advantage of the guerrillas had been mishandled, and this raises numerous questions. Why did they leave behind the ammunition for the weapons they had laboriously confiscated from the armoury? Why did they forget to distribute their crucial propaganda leaflets? Why did they leave behind their explosives? Why did they abort the plan to blow up the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station and to disarm the Forest Guard Headquarters? Why was the Forest Guard vehicle not blown up as planned? The team had been successful in taking over the station, but it had failed to carry out its other key objectives.

The mountain team had intended to train and arm new recruits who were to join them after the strike, with the arms and ammunition seized at Siyahkal. The fact that the team had forgotten to take the ammunition would have compromised their plans had they succeeded in escaping unscathed. Also, the failure to distribute the pamphlets at Siyahkal reduced the blow of their political punch. The important message, announcing their existence, mission, and identity, went mute. Had they succeeded in continuing with their operations in the region, the

villagers would not have been able to distinguish between them and mere bandits.

The poor performance of the guerrillas, when confronted with unexpected complications, could be attributed to their lack of training and resourcefulness. Other than Safa'i-Farahani, and to some extent Farhoudi, the rest had no combat experience. They were essentially young enthusiastic university graduates, unfamiliar with guns and ammunition. During their reconnaissance mission, the team had had plenty of time to engage in military exercises, combat training, and shooting practice. Yet in effect, they had spent most of their time learning survival techniques, mountain climbing, map-reading, and endurance skills. Their practice shooting experience had been very limited due to the scarcity of ammunition. During their seemingly single shooting drill in the forests, each member had been allocated only ten rounds of ammunition when practising with machine guns, and three rounds of ammunition when using handguns.²³

▪

The retreat phase of the operation had been equally mishandled. Clearly, the arrest and torture of the urban team, which had led to the capture of the vital liaison personnel, had compromised, and jarred the mountain team. The speed at which their food storage facilities were uncovered and emptied crippled their strategy to stay in the region and strike again. Having to rely on food from villagers proved to be fatal. Houshang Nayyeri's injury, and the adverse winter weather conditions, had slowed down their movement and sapped their energy. The substantial and rapid deployment of military personnel to the area proved to be debilitating.

The role of the locals in informing on the guerrillas and capturing them was instrumental in their defeat. Had the locals not consistently cooperated with the authorities against the guerrillas, the mountain team may not have been destroyed so easily. The theoreticians of armed struggle had not expected the rural community to help the anti-Shah movement. They had thought erroneously that the villagers would stay on the sidelines. The fact was that the villagers viewed the guerrillas as enemies and not as liberators fighting for their rights. This major psychological complication and confusion had fatal consequences. The guerrillas had a serious moral dilemma shooting at hostile civilians.

The nineteen-day experience of the Siyahkal operation displayed the extent to which the revolutionaries had lacked the discipline, alertness, and the capacity

for violence of seasoned guerrillas. When confronted with villagers, one of the main challenges for the guerrillas was their reluctance to deal with them as potential enemies. Their hesitation and moral quandary were one of the main reasons for their arrest and final defeat. According to Che Guevara, guerrillas were to become “effective, violent, selective, and cold killing machines”. By such standards, the performance at Siyahkal fell well below the norm. In his last pep talk right before the assault on Siyahkal, Safa’i-Farahani, the seasoned commander who had served in combat with the PLO, had emphasized the importance of a bloodless operation. If the use of force was to become necessary, he advised his men to shoot in the air to scare off their opponents.²⁴

▪

During the arrest of Safa’i-Farahani and his men at Kolestan, not one of them had shot to kill.

On three occasions the guerrillas encountered the military, exchanged gunfire with them and inflicted losses on them. The mountain team was psychologically prepared to shoot at men in uniforms, but not at belligerent villagers who were intent on capturing them. When coming face to face with a superior military force, the guerrillas fought effectively. However, when surrounded by villagers, they fired intentionally in the air to avoid killing civilians. According to Hamid Ashraf, their kind-heartedness and tenderness, combined with their preoccupation with not seeming ruthless and violent, had been one of the reasons that led to the total destruction of the mountain team.²⁵

▪

The guerrillas had not fully come to grips with the moral conundrum of wounding, or possibly killing the enemy, military and especially civilian.

The arrest of Safa’i-Farahani, Houshang Nayyeri, and Jalil Enferadi demonstrated a lack of vigilance and professionalism on the part of the guerrillas. They should have been on their guard when a few hours earlier they had heard shots on their descent from Kakouh. According to one account, during their reconnaissance mission, and prior to the assault, the mountain team had eaten at the houses of villagers and had not raised their suspicion.²⁶

▪

This suggests that seeking food from villagers had not been unusual. However, after the assault, and the militarization of the entire area, they should have been

on their guard.

Ashraf argued that one of the many tactical reasons for the annihilation of the mountain team had been the delay in launching the operation.²⁷

▪

Safa'i-Farahani seemed to have planned to strike sometime around 30 December 1970, after having completed his three-and-a-half-month reconnaissance mission in Gilan and Mazandaran. In hindsight, had the mountain team attacked as planned they would have avoided the adverse repercussions of the first and second waves of arrests on 14 December 1970 and 31 January of 1971. They might have taken the military and security apparatus by complete surprise and delayed the military retaliation against them. A delayed military deployment may have augmented considerably their chances of a successful retreat. Their two important local liaison personnel would have remained intact, and their storage depots would not have been ransacked. Had Iraj Nayyeri not been arrested, this trusted teacher might have had a better chance of obtaining local support from the villagers. It is most likely that in the absence of government propaganda against "the bandits", the general reaction of the villagers would have also been quite different.

▪

The regime's first public response to the Siyahkal strike

With the arrest of Mohaddes-Qandchi on 27 February 1971, the Shah's regime had successfully wrapped up the military aspect of Siyahkal. In retrospect, this may have been its easiest task. In time, the main challenge of the regime became the announcement and explanation of the attack without making it into a cause célèbre. The government had to find ways to justify the extensive executions after the attack, without further radicalizing the youth at home and abroad. Neutralizing the birth of a myth around the attack while controlling disturbances in Iranian universities in response to Siyahkal presented an unending series of

challenges for the regime.

On Tuesday, 9 February 1971, Keyhan published a detailed report entitled “Armed Men Attack the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station”. The news item informed the public that the identity of the assailants was not known to the authorities and the military personnel at Siyahkal had been taken by surprise. It reported that the armed men had not been arrested, even though the gendarmes were in pursuit. SAVAK must have been upset with this report. Subsequently, a gag order was imposed on the media in relation to news on Siyahkal.

It was not until the fourth day of the Iranian New Year, forty-three days after the assault on Siyahkal, that the Iranian press was allowed to report again on the event. On Wednesday, 24 March 1971, both Keyhan and Ettela‘at reported that the Shah had communicated his gratitude to the families of the six martyred and the ten injured in the “Siyahkal event” (vaqe‘h-e Siyahkal). On behalf of the Shah, the Minister of Court had praised the killed and wounded for their courage and bravery. On Thursday, 25 March, while Ettela‘at kept silent, Keyhan published a rather thoroughly researched photo-journalistic report on Siyahkal, with interviews of local villagers and eyewitness reports on the scuffles, engagements, and fighting. On Saturday, 27 March, many Iranians were still on their New Year vacations when the Iranian press reported the execution of thirteen members of a group associated with the attack on Siyahkal. Ten days after the execution, the press wrote that the thirteen had faced a firing squad at dawn on Wednesday, 17 March 1971. The names and professions of those executed were announced along with a very brief report of the events at Siyahkal.

The regime was in a hurry to make an example of the guerrillas implicated in the attack. Mohaddes-Qandchi was the last member of the nine-man mountain team to be arrested, on 27 February 1971. Within seventeen days of his arrest, the authorities had tried and executed thirteen people in connection with the attack. A few days after the arrest of the mountain team, the Shah ordered the Army’s Prosecutor General to handle this special case. On trial were seven members of the mountain team: Safa’i-Farahani, Enferadi, Houshang Nayyeri, Farhoudi, Bandekkhoda-Langaroudi, Mohaddes-Qandchi, and Danesh-Behzadi. There were also six members of the urban team: Hasanpour, Fazeli, Moshayyedi, Mo‘ini-‘Araqi, Dalil-Safa’i, and Rahimi-Meschi.

The trial began behind closed doors on Wednesday, 10 March 1971 and ended

on the same day, condemning all thirteen defendants to death.²⁸

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The defendants appealed their initial sentences, but the Shah would not hear of it. Their sentence was upheld by the appellate court on 15 March 1971 and carried out summarily two days later.²⁹

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It was only in the appellate court that the defendants had the opportunity to speak in their own defence. All thirteen were executed on charges of conspiring to overthrow the regime, founding an armed group of bandits, murder, armed robbery, participation in a communist group, and carrying and storing illegal arms and ammunition.³⁰

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Eight of the thirteen revolutionaries executed were students or graduates of the best universities in Iran. One had graduated from a reputable institute of technology. Three were high school graduates and two among them were teachers. Only one among the thirteen had been a worker. The two guerrillas killed in action, Eshaqi and Sama'i, had been students of geology and engineering at Shiraz University and Tehran's Polytechnic University, respectively. The average age of the thirteen executed, and the two killed in combat, was twenty-seven. The youngest among the fifteen dead was Houshang Nayyeri, twenty-two years old, and the eldest was Safa'i-Farahani, thirty-one years old. Three among the fifteen were born in Tehran, three in Lahijan, while the rest came from Shiraz, Bam, Sari, Sangsar, Rasht, Arak, Tabriz, and Firouzabad. The relative majority came from the Northern provinces, five from Gilan and one from Mazandaran.

Safa'i-Farahani, Enferadi, and Sama'i had been experienced mountain and rock climbers. Enferadi, a welder and a member of the welders' syndicate, had been the only proletarian member of the group, while Safa'i-Farahani had been the only one with considerable military training in the Palestine Liberation Organization camps. He was said to have led some 150 PLO guerrillas and participated in numerous incursions into Israeli territory.³¹

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Farhoudi, Moshayyedi, Mo'ini-'Araqi, and Fazeli had participated in armed bank robberies prior to the Siyahkal operation and had some combat experience.

From the list of thirteen executed revolutionaries, no less than nine had been directly recruited by Hasanpour and belonged either to the networks he had created at Tehran's Polytechnic University or in Lahijan. From the two killed in action during the Siyahkal operation, one had been directly recruited by Hasanpour and the other was the cousin of the first. Of the thirteen executed, twelve belonged to the H-A-S Group, and one, Farhoudi, belonged to the P-A-M Group. According to Ashraf, only five members of the mountain and urban team remained alive and at large after 17 March 1971. The five remnants of the H-A-S Group were Ashraf, Sadeqinejad, Saffari-Ashtiyani, Manouchehr Baha'ipour, and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri.³²

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Two of the five, Manouchehr Baha'ipour and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, were Hasanpour's recruits.

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The Ranking Security Official's spectacle

On 4 April 1971, the regime launched a full-scale and minutely prepared propaganda campaign. SAVAK's strongman, the Ranking Security Official, proved himself a capable showman, hosting a radio and television spectacle widely reported in the press. The Ranking Security Official's show started at 08:30 and he set out to reveal the secrets surrounding the Siyahkal strike. Pretending that the long news blackout on Siyahkal had not happened, the Ranking Security Official insisted on the government's intention to exercise transparency and full disclosure, be it good or bad news.

The Ranking Security Official presented the Siyahkal group as a communist-terrorist organization, charged to begin guerrilla warfare in Iran, while being armed and financed by foreigners. The Ranking Security Official accused the group of bank robberies, burning cinemas, and fomenting strikes across Iranian universities. He also charged them with the murder of their own members. The

Ranking Security Official repeated the Shah's position, that dissent and opposition in Iran were sponsored and financed by foreigners. The Ranking Security Official's show had two major objectives. It intended to vilify the guerrillas as terrorists, saboteurs, and traitors. It also hoped to scare future revolutionaries and dissuade them from engaging in any "anti-state" activities, be they passive or active. The guerrillas had cracked the sturdy image of the regime's invincibility, and it needed to be mended quickly and skilfully. The authority of the state needed to be firmly re-established, and fear needed to be put back into the hearts of the daring.

The Ranking Security Official provided a false and highly exaggerated image of SAVAK, and its knowledge of the activities of the revolutionaries. Depicting SAVAK as an omnipresent security organization, the Ranking Security Official hoped to convey the image that all opposition and non-opposition organizations had been infiltrated by its agents. Playing coy, the Ranking Security Official rejected the rumours that SAVAK had five million employees. Nevertheless, he informed his audience of patriotic volunteers who were present at all types of gatherings and were active in every organization in the land. These patriots, he said, willingly cooperated with SAVAK, without officially being employees of that organization.

The Ranking Security Official portrayed an image of absolute control over the political undercurrents in the country. He falsely asserted that the activities of the Siyahkal organization had been known to SAVAK as early as September 1970. Claiming knowledge of every movement of the revolutionaries, the Ranking Security Official posited that SAVAK had waited for the opportune moment to round up all the members of the Siyahkal group. To cover up for SAVAK's inability to prevent the attack on Siyahkal, the Ranking Security Official claimed that when SAVAK had moved to arrest the guerrillas, nine members of the mountain team had managed to escape into the mountains. Having just hammered at the omnipresence and omniscience of SAVAK, the Ranking Security Official now threatened that anyone helping, accommodating, or giving shelter to individuals associated with this network would be committing an offence.

Talk of SAVAK's prowess was for the benefit of all Iranians, although it was particularly directed at the youth, and especially the university students, the potentially future guerrillas, both in Iran and abroad. The Ranking Security Official warned families that it was their duty to prevent their children from

falling into the trap of “deviant ideas” (afkar-e enherafi). He spoke of the regime’s lack of mercy towards political offenders, then displayed SAVAK’s “compassionate” face, as he spoke of its policy of “guidance and not revenge”. The Ranking Security Official was leaving the door open to those who were willing to report on their children’s anti-state activities and was inviting the “misguided simpletons” who were penitent to come forward, to recant, and collaborate.

The regime had been concerned with the increasing number of Iranian students living abroad who were actively involved in the Confederation of Iranian Students National Union, and its anti-government activities. The Ranking Security Official reminded the students that, according to an official announcement by the office of the Military Prosecutor General, membership in the Confederation had been made illegal. General Siyavosh Behzadi had given the students living abroad until the first day of the Iranian New Year (21 March 1971) to end their membership in the Confederation, or else face prosecution.³³

▪

Behzadi deemed the activities of the Confederation of Iranian Students as opposed to “national interests” and “against state security”. The Iranian security apparatus was convinced that the Confederation of Iranian Students was manipulated by the communists and was a pawn in the hands of foreign powers. The Ranking Security Official characterized those who continued to be members of the Confederation of Iranian Students after the deadline of 21 March 1971 as “terrorists”, “agitators”, and “expert saboteurs”.³⁴

▪

The post-Siyahkal atmosphere was one of anxiety and challenge for the regime and its security apparatus. SAVAK was mindful that armed struggle had resonated with the Iranian student body, both at home and abroad. It needed, therefore, to demonstrate that despite the threat from the guerrilla movement, it maintained firm control of the situation. General Ne‘matollah Nasiri, the director of SAVAK, and his ranking authorities needed to prove that SAVAK, its interrogators, torturers, and personnel were worth their keep in the Shah’s hour of need. With unlimited and unchecked power at its disposal, SAVAK needed to show results and keep the Shah content.

Notes

[1](#)

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Keyhan, 20 Ordibehesht 1350.

[2](#)

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Ettela'at and Keyhan, 29 Ordibehesht 1350.

[3](#)

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Mardom, Esfand 1349–Farvardin 1350.

[4](#)

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Mardom, Esfand 1349–Farvardin 1350.

[5](#)

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Toufan, Farvardin 1350, shomareh 44.

[6](#)

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Toufan, Shahrivar 1348, shomareh 25.

[7](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, 1 Ordibehesht 1350.

[8](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, vol. 1, pp. 191–192.

[9](#)

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I am grateful to Shahram Qanbari for this point.

[10](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 169. Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's interrogation reports.

[11](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 5–6.

[12](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 12.

[13](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 24–25, 134–135, 137–139.

[14](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 13.

[15](#)

▪

Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, p. 7.

[16](#)

▪

Hamaseh Siyahkal, p. 96.

[17](#)

▪

Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, pp. 6–7;
Hamaseh Siyahkal, p. 68.

[18](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 23–24;
Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 95–96.

[19](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 21, 23;
Hamaseh Siyahkal, p. 96.

[20](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 223, Safa’i-Farahani’s trial reports.

[21](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 225, Safa’i-Farahani’s trial reports.

[22](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 224, Safa’i-Farahani’s trial reports.

[23](#)

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Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 67–68.

[24](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 225. Safa'i-Farahani's trial reports.

[25](#)

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, pp. 21–23.

[26](#)

•

Hamaseh Siyahkal, p. 50.

[27](#)

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, p. 21.

[28](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 222. Rowhani, p. 433, using the same archives, not open to the public, reports that the first court hearing was on Sunday, 7 March 1971. I have chosen Naderi's date as it has a reference.

[29](#)

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Rowhani, p. 433.

[30](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 222.

[31](#)

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Hamaseh Siyahkal, pp. 8–9.

[32](#)

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Ashraf, *Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh*, p. 27; Ashraf, *Jam'bandi-e seh saleh*, p. 13.

[33](#)

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Ettela'at, 28 Dey 1349.

[34](#)

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Ettela'at and Keyhan, 15 Farvardin 1350. In an interview with Erfan Qane'ifard, Parviz Sabeti, the head of SAVAK's Third Bureau or internal security, claims that he was the person who conducted this interview and explained the activities of these people. He also claims that the interview had been ordered by the Shah and the host was specifically designated by the King, Qane'ifard, p. 241.

The Hamid Ashraf Factor

Marxism takes pride in minimizing the role of the individual in history. Theoretically, it stands opposed to the idea that history is made by distinguished individuals. Yet, the history of Marxism is replete with noteworthy individual theoreticians and revolutionaries. The Marxian hall of fame is no different from its bourgeois counterpart in terms of prominent individuals who made history. The words and deeds of specific individuals and their mode of social interaction pushes them to a position of trust, authority, and leadership. It would be difficult to tell what would have happened to the Iranian Marxist guerrilla movement between 1968 and 1976 without Hamid Ashraf. During this period, Ashraf rose discreetly to an eminent position of moral, political, and military authority among his comrades-in-arms. Most importantly, he became a daunting adversary in the eyes of his enemies. History showed that without the active presence of certain key names, the Fada'i movement had managed to survive, but when Ashraf was no longer, it nose-dived.

Schooling

Hamid Ashraf was born in Tehran to Esma‘il Ashraf and Ashraf Taqdisi on 31 December 1946. Both of his parents were well educated, and his father had spent some two years in Germany studying railroad networks and systems. Hamid had two older sisters, one older brother, and a younger brother. Once his father was transferred to Azarbayjan as chief of Railroad and Shipping Offices, Hamid attended primary school (1953–1959) at Arya and Parvaresh schools in Tabriz. In the third grade (1956) Hamid ranked first in his class. His prize was a poetry book of Hafez, specifically conceived for fortune-telling (fal-e hafez). In Tabriz, Hamid had two kinds of socializing. His father’s position required mingling with the children of Tabriz’s upper-class bureaucrats, while his friends and playmates were the lower-class children of railway workers. He finished sixth grade at Parvaresh with an average of 17.59 out of 20.

Ahmad Ashraf, Hamid’s older brother, was a politically precocious child, nicknamed “Ahmad the politicized” (Ahmad-e siyasi) by his primary school friends. Ahmad was in the tenth grade (1950–1951) when he joined the nationalist Pan-Iranist Party of Mohsen Pezeshkpour. Not made for party discipline and blind obedience, he was expelled after a few months. His political activities led to his dismissal from Alborz high school, at the end of tenth grade. Ahmad remained a staunch Mosaddeqist and later became interested in Khalil Maleki’s socialist Third Force Party (Nirouy-e sevom). Even though he never joined the party, he contributed articles to its publication, Elm va Zendegi (Science and Livelihood).

Right after the coup, Ahmad Ashraf entered Tehran University’s Faculty of Law in September 1953. In 1957, during his regular visits to Tabriz, Ahmad would sit down with Hamid, who was about eleven at the time, and talk politics. He would speak about the freedoms that had existed before the coup, political life under Mosaddeq’s government, and the coup. Ahmad also lectured his little brother on the history of political movements in Iran. The young Hamid proved to be a keen and attentive pupil.¹

▪

When the family returned to Tehran, Hamid attended the third section of the seventh grade at Alborz high school during the academic year 1959–1960. The following year, Alborz hesitated to readmit him. The authorities at Alborz had received reports that during his first academic year, Hamid had incited students to throw bricks at the police during unrests. Ahmad Ashraf accompanied Hamid to school to discuss the matter with Jalal Afshar, the assistant principal, and with

Mohammad-‘Ali Mojtahedi, the legendary principal of Alborz. After some discussions, Mojtahedi agreed to allow Hamid to continue at Alborz.²

▪

In the middle of the academic year 1960–1961, Hamid got himself into another sticky situation, one where even Mojtahedi could no longer protect the young maverick. During an ordinary dispute between youngsters, a fellow student, who happened to be General Gholam-‘Ali Oveysi’s son, had tried to support his argument by evoking a statement attributed to the Shah. In response, the fifteen-year-old Hamid had responded publicly, Shah goh khord.³

▪

The Farsi expression goh khord, which literary means “ate shit”, is customarily used in response to baseless or nonsensical statements and utterances. Irrespective of intent, publicly claiming that the Shah “ate shit” had dire consequences. In the middle of the 1960–1961 academic year, Hamid was dismissed from Alborz.

So, Hamid transferred to Rakhshan high school, which later changed its name to Kharazmi. At Kharazmi, he became close friends with Farrokh Negahdar. The two sixteen-year-olds participated in National Front demonstrations and became involved in the student unrest of 21 January 1962. After one and a half academic years at Kharazmi, Hamid once again switched schools, and began his tenth grade at Hadaf high school. The reason for leaving Kharazmi was his dissatisfaction with the quality of some of the teachers, especially his Algebra teacher. In a letter to Ahmad, his brother, Hamid wrote enthusiastically about his purchase of Mohammad-‘Ali Foroughi’s Seyr hekmat dar orupa (History of Philosophy in Europe) while he was in the ninth grade.⁴

▪

Even though Hamid had changed schools, he kept in touch with Negahdar. During the summer of 1962, Hamid, who had been interested in boxing and swimming, became involved in mountaineering and rock climbing. He enjoyed reading Hemingway, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, and Turgenev, along with books on history. He was also fond of going to the movies and had a good knowledge of movie stars.⁵

▪

In the fall of 1964, having spent two years at Hadaf, Hamid changed schools for

the last time, and transferred to Darolfonoun. During his last high school year Ashraf became classmates with Farrokh Negahdar, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, Bahman Ajang, and Houshang 'Azimi, who were all to become involved in the guerrilla movement. While Negahdar was involved in National Front student politics, Ashraf kept his distance from such activities. It was only during the academic year of 1964–1965 that Ashraf joined a circle connected with Bijan Jazani. This circle was composed of Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, Negahdar, Houshang Azimi, and Ashraf.⁶

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In the summer of 1965, Ashraf graduated from high school. That summer was an eventful one. Jazani was said to have gone on a mountain climbing expedition during which he had gotten lost, and it was Ashraf who rescued him.⁷

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Ashraf spent the academic year 1965–1966 preparing for the highly competitive Iranian university entrance exams. During this year, he attended classes to become an adult literacy teacher. He obtained his teaching certificate from the National Committee for Combatting Illiteracy (komiteh melli-ye peykar ba bisavadi) on 20 January 1966 and began working as an adult literacy teacher.⁸

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At a meeting convened by Jazani in April/May 1966, Jazani assigned Ashraf to the military and Negahdar to the political branch of his group.⁹

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Four months later, in fall 1966, Ashraf entered the prestigious Engineering Faculty of Tehran University. At university, he did not become involved with student politics, and even discouraged others from becoming embroiled in such activities. During his university life, Ashraf gave the image of a happy-go-lucky, non-political athlete. He was the captain of the Engineering Faculty's swimming team and an avid mountain climber.

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Ashraf in the eyes of fellow combatants

Around the end of October 1971, the old wing of Evin prison housed some thirty notable Fada'i political prisoners in one common room known as the "big room". This was the biggest congregation of Fada'i leaders awaiting trial. Among them were Mas'oud and Majid Ahmadzadeh, 'Abbas and Asadollah Meftahi, 'Ali-Reza Nabdell, Bahman Ajang, Gholamreza Galavi, Rahim Karimiyan, Sa'id Ariyan, 'Ali-Asghar Izadi, Mehdi Savalouni, Fariborz Sanjari, and Bahram Qobadi. All branches of the Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi Group were represented. Mehdi Same' was the only representative of the Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa'i-Farahani Group. The "big room" exuded a sense of excitement as old comrades spoke of their experiences and exploits.

With execution staring them in the face, and having lost Pouyan and Sadeqinejad, in a gun battle, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh and 'Abbas Meftahi spoke about their anxieties and longings. Concerned with the future of the Fada'i movement, both expressed great relief that Hamid Ashraf was at liberty. They believed that Ashraf's presence assured the smooth functioning of the Fada'is from an organizational and recruitment point of view. However, they seemed to be concerned with the possibility of a theoretical vacuum. Even though members spoke about Jazani and his group, no reference was made to Jazani's theories or ideas.¹⁰

▪

Fariborz Sanjari's recollection of the discussions in the "big room" was different. He did not recall Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh and 'Abbas Meftahi placing a particular emphasis on the future role of Ashraf in their discussions. According to Sanjari, they spoke of 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari as a comrade who could take care of the Group's theoretical concerns, while Ashraf could manage its organizational side. Sanjari recalled 'Abbas Meftahi stating that Ashraf "did not possess a strategic view of the struggle, but a tactical one".¹¹

▪

To gauge Ashraf's leadership qualities after the arrest of Ahmadzadeh and Meftahi, it would be necessary to assess his record between the end of August 1971 and the end of June 1976. Based on the testimony of his comrades-in-arms, Hamid Ashraf had three distinct features that made him a discreet, yet

impressive revolutionary. According to guerrillas who met, worked with, and knew him, Ashraf commanded an unadulterated sense of respect. He spoke little but was happy to answer questions. His comrades spoke of his concern with the well-being of his fellow guerrillas, chastising and encouraging them almost like a mother hen. His patience, cool-headedness, and resourcefulness, even under pressure, was recognized as one of his strengths. His laid-back air, in the face of adversity, relieved anxiety among those around him.

Ashraf was also exceptionally agile, nimble, fast-thinking, and fast-acting. Reports of his military feats abound, reaching legendary dimensions, transforming him into a revolutionary icon. Written accounts of military operations present him as a person with quick reflexes, an alert mind, and sharp eyes. His physical fitness as a swimmer and a rock climber aided him in his regular getaways from the security forces. Ashraf was always armed, even when assisting in surgeries, cutting, and sewing up wounded guerrillas. At the intersection of myth and reality, there are stories about Ashraf's Zorro-like invincibility, battling with police and security forces, two to three times in one day, and even managing to escape in a car owned by the police or SAVAK.

According to his peers, Ashraf was an untiring hands-on guerrilla teacher, manager, group counsellor, and revolutionary organizer. The breadth of his multitasking as a revolutionary leader was noteworthy. Ashraf trained recruits in different cells and hideouts, gave them lessons in firing various kinds of arms, took them target practising, and assisted them in handling explosives. He supervised and liaised between the growing number of Fada'i safe houses and cells in Tehran and the provinces. Ashraf kept regular tabs on the safety and security of the Fada'i hideouts.

He helped in improvised operations on wounded guerrillas, and later nursed them. When safe houses had to be evacuated quickly after the arrest of comrades, Ashraf moved furniture, duplicating machines, and X-ray machines for medical purposes, from one hideout to another. He closely supervised the academic and personal development of Arjang Shaygan-Shamasbi, a young boy who lived in a guerrilla safe house after the arrest of his mother and brother. Sheyda Nabavi, a veteran Fada'i combatant, categorized Ashraf as "the most outstanding operational and organizational cadre of the Fada'is".¹²

▪

During the five-month reconnaissance mission of the mountain team led by

Safa'i-Farahani in Mazandaran, Gilan, and Gorgan, Ashraf procured, transported, and supplied the guerrillas regularly with provisions, from food and clothing to arms and explosives. He was the liaison between Tehran and Safa'i-Farahani's roving mountain team. Ashraf participated in negotiations with other revolutionary groups. From the inception of the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas, he had been a member of successive Fada'i leadership teams.

Ashraf also found time to write a one-year, and a three-year report, which outlined and assessed the activities of the Group. He wrote and compiled a detailed account of seventeen military operations in a pamphlet called *Some Experiences of Urban Guerrilla Warfare in Iran* (Pareh'i az tajrobiyat-e jang-e cheriki-e shahri dar Iran). In addition, he contributed at least one editorial to the Fada'i publication *Nabard-e Khalq* (People's Combat), took part in its distribution, and wrote an introduction to Ashraf Dehqani's account of her arrest and escape from prison.¹³

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In the eyes of those who fought at his side, most believed that Ashraf's comportment at the helm of the Fada'is commanded respect. However, there were a few who found fault with him. 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari praised Ashraf during his interrogations for his technical and tactical capabilities as well as his organizational experience. However, he maintained that Ashraf "was devoid of any theoretical and strategic value and merit".¹⁴

▪

Bahram Qobadi's view of Ashraf was mixed. While living in the same safe house as him, Qobadi considered him a sensational (shourangiz) person and praised Ashraf for his cool-headedness in the face of danger, his agility, and ability to tail and get away.

Once in prison, Bahram Qobadi chided him on two accounts. Qobadi considered Jamshidi-Roudbari to be the last theoretically gifted member of the "genuine" (asli) Fada'is. Qobadi argued that after the death of Jamshidi-Roudbari, and under the influence of Jazani, Ashraf had veered the Group towards Jazani's views. Qobadi came to believe that Ashraf was incapable of managing the Fada'i Organization's affairs from a theoretical and organizational point of view. Qobadi concluded that consequently, "Jazani, with his limited knowledge of Marxism, moved the group in the old direction of the Tudeh Party."¹⁵

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Parviz Sabeti, who had closely followed Hamid Ashraf's tracks for five years, could not hide his esteem. Sabeti described Ashraf as an "extremely courageous and physically robust person who succeeded in breaking out of numerous encirclements and battles". In SAVAK's reports to the Shah, Ashraf was referred to as the leader of the organization, and it is said that whenever guerrillas were arrested or killed, the Shah would quickly enquire, "What news of Hamid Ashraf?" or "What have you done about him?"¹⁶

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Three years of guerrilla struggle in perspective

Three years after Siyahkal, Hamid Ashraf wrote a 27,000-word pamphlet called Three-Year Assessment [of struggle] (Jam'bandi-e seh saleh). In this unfinished review, Ashraf tried to present a balanced report of the successes and failures of the Fada'i guerrillas, from around February 1971 to February 1974. He divided this three-year period into seven distinct stages, but the pamphlet ended abruptly after his assessment and evaluation of the second stage. His everyday preoccupations with the guerrilla movement probably prevented him from finishing his report. This pamphlet, however, contains reliable inside information on the practical issues and dilemmas that the guerrillas faced. Ashraf addressed specific critical issues which could be considered as a response to some of Jazani's comments from prison on the armed struggle movement.

In this writing, Ashraf was lucid about the perspective and strategy of the Group. Acknowledging the disastrous consequence of losing Pouyan and Sadeqinejad in May 1971, Ashraf distinguished between the chilling grief of losing close comrades and the long-term ardour needed to pursue the movement. Almost cold-heartedly, Ashraf minimized the loss of his comrades, arguing that their death could not weaken the resolve of the Group. He explained "these events as inevitable and natural". The loss of fighters incurred personal grief but was not to become an impediment to the movement. Ashraf reported that after losing Pouyan and Sadeqinejad, "The comrades knew that, based on their common

guiding principles, they needed to move forward, even if it meant that no one would stay alive.”¹⁷

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In this writing, Ashraf warned that an excess of zeal and passion could lead the guerrillas towards unrealistic and illusory operations and goals. He reproached the guerrillas and himself for the lack of “tangible and objective experience” with the realities on the ground.¹⁸

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Ashraf argued that the transformation of ideas into action required hands-on knowledge of barriers confronting the implementation of plans. For Ashraf, “the only instrument capable of correcting theory was action.” He reminded his fellow guerrillas that “the most fundamental rationale in the Marxist–Leninist school of thought” was Mao’s statement that, “action is the only yardstick of truth.”¹⁹

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At the time that Ashraf was writing this pamphlet, the twenty-eight-year-old revolutionary leader had already some eight years of active political agitation and revolutionary struggle behind him. Whereas the average life expectancy of a revolutionary entering clandestine guerrilla life was a few months, Ashraf had been leading the guerrilla movement for some three years. His experience had taught him that to see the practical unfolding of revolutionary theory, one needed to enter the fray and fully participate in it. Ashraf’s emphasis on the importance of revolutionary action as a regulator of revolutionary theory was a piece of advice to armchair revolutionaries at home and abroad as well as to those comrades behind bars.

Ashraf’s debate with ‘Abbas Meftahi and Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh over resuming rural guerrilla operations in the Shahroud area around June 1971 sheds considerable light on Ashraf’s way of thinking. Meftahi’s reportedly dim view of Ashraf’s theoretical capabilities may be related to this debate. From about May 1971, the Fada’i guerrillas committed their energy to disrupting the 2,500-year celebrations of the Iranian monarchy scheduled in October.²⁰

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Meftahi had received a favourable report on the availability of an insurrectionary opportunity from one of his contacts. Based on this report, he had proposed the

resumption of military operations in the northern mountainous regions to eclipse the celebrations. Ahmadzadeh was in favour of Meftahi's proposal, arguing that the organization had "sufficient means, resources, and manpower" and could "mobilize efforts in that direction".²¹

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At this time, the old proponents of urban warfare were making a case for rural/mountainous operations.

In what seemed to be a radical reversal of roles since the debate over joining the Siyahkal assault, Ashraf strongly opposed the resumption of rural activities, arguing that the organization was ill-equipped in terms of arms and ammunition, and lacked well-trained manpower to successfully launch such an operation in a few months.²²

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Ashraf reminded his comrades how much time and effort had gone into the preparation of the Siyahkal strike. He pointed out that, at the time (September 1970 to February 1971), the security services and the military had been completely oblivious to their activities, enabling the guerrillas to move around with some degree of freedom. After Siyahkal, however, security and military forces had become much more vigilant and on a constant state of alert, rendering the rudimentary operation of storing provisions in the area extremely risky. Comparing the degrees of preparedness between the Siyahkal strike and their actual status and condition, Ashraf reasoned that they were unprepared for a new mountain operation.²³

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Ashraf outlined in detail the minimum requirements for preparing an assault team and engaging in operations by late September and early October 1971. He posited that none of those conditions were available and cautioned against unnecessarily risky operations.²⁴

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Despite Ashraf's disagreement, the majority in the leadership group voted in favour of the project, and Ashraf was placed in charge of drawing up operational plans. From mid-June 1971 onwards, more than half the resources of the organization were committed to the mountain operation. The plan was for the reconnaissance mission to start in the summer and the final operation to be

launched in October 1971. Saffari-Ashtiyani was once again dispatched to obtain arms in Palestine, and attempts were made to mobilize the organization's sympathizers in the region.²⁵

▪

Bahram Qobadi recalled that after the merger, the leadership team (markaziyat) concluded that Siyahkal had proven to be a failure politically; however, it had been a unique watershed. In their assessment, Siyahkal and the guerrillas had widespread support in society and especially among students. They decided, therefore, to pursue operations like Siyahkal in other rural/mountainous areas without settling in those areas. These hit and run rural military operations would be modelled on urban guerrilla activities.

It was after this decision that a logistical team composed of Changiz and Bahram Qobadi, Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan, and Mohammad-‘Ali Partovi was formed. The team made three reconnaissance trips to Mazandaran and stockpiled rice, raisins, and walnuts around the Azadkouh area. On their third trip, the four members were arrested near the forested regions close to Nowshahr and dispatched to SAVAK Headquarters in Sari. On 24 July 1971, accompanied by two SAVAK agents, Changiz Qobadi who was at the wheel of the car, managed to intentionally overturn the car and allow the team a getaway. Changiz and Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan managed to escape, but Bahram Qobadi and Partovi were wounded and arrested.²⁶

▪

According to Ashraf, the plan to launch operations in October was idealistic and unrealistic. He believed that weakening the urban teams by deploying them to the rural areas would be highly dangerous. The plan “dispersed the comrades”, forcing the organization to “move in numerous directions in order to secure the necessary means to prepare for this project” and forced “establishing new contacts”.²⁷

▪

Ashraf believed that the operation exposed the organization to threats and dangers leading to “the total destruction of the organization”.²⁸

▪

Ashraf, the supposedly romantic and adventurist commander of the Fada'i guerrillas, spoke as a rationalist concerned with the costs and benefits of every

decision. He observed that the plan to open a new front in the mountainous areas “had no gains for the organization and would cause us to lose all that we have”.²⁹

•

Given his years of practical experience, it was natural for Ashraf to focus on the survival, consolidation, and expansion of urban guerrilla operations. Preparations for the mountainous operation scheduled for October 1971 were underway but had to be aborted in mid-August 1971 after Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh and ‘Abbas Meftahi were arrested and Changiz Qobadi’s logistical team was disbanded.

By the time Ashraf was writing his Three-Year Assessment, he had witnessed the near annihilation of the Fada’i guerrillas more than once, and every time he and his comrades had tried to learn from past mistakes. According to Ashraf, one of the fatal mistakes of the organization at the end of July 1971 had been the scattering and dispersing of the guerrillas and their attempt at pursuing too many objectives at the same time.³⁰

•

In 1973, from prison, Jazani was calling on the Fada’i guerrillas to diversify their efforts in four separate directions. Jazani encouraged the Fada’is to redirect part of their manpower to political, guild, and propaganda activities and devote some of their fighters to overseas activities. Furthermore, he prompted them to move their fighters to the rural and mountainous areas, and finally actively support ethnic and tribal movements. To Ashraf, such policy recommendations seemed reckless because they implied taking on new projects without proper preparation. Under the regime’s constant attack, Ashraf was not willing to risk the dispersion of the Fada’is’ meagre forces. Ashraf called for “realistic plans” which could be accomplished with the “capacities and potentials of the organization”.³¹

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He warned against communists becoming “more idealist than the idealists”, exposing themselves to “unshielded situations”, and “running in many directions”.³²

•

Ashraf observed that before the arrest of Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh and ‘Abbas Meftahi (probably early June 1971), the Fada’i guerrillas could have potentially

organized eight teams, each composed of four to five guerrillas. The problem was, however, that they “did not even have 8 ‘relatively experienced’ fighters who could lead the teams”.³³

▪

By September 1971, the situation had completely changed. The Fada’is had lost about ninety percent of their fighters and were on the verge of complete collapse. Only two guerrilla teams remained intact, each composed of four fighters.

Ashraf commanded a team composed of Shirin Mo’azed, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, and ‘Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, while Hasan Nowrouzi commanded a second team composed of Ahmad Zibrom, Farrokh Sepehri, and ‘Ali-Akbar Ja’fari.³⁴

▪

Ashraf and Saffari-Ashtiyani were the last remaining members of the H-A-S Group. The other six were the remainders of the P-A-M Group. From a total of about eighty-nine members, twenty-three belonging to the H-A-S Group and the remainder to the P-A-M Group, only some eight survived. By September 1971, the decimation of the Fada’is’ rank and file was glaring and its rebound even more impressive.

▪

Ashraf violent and authoritarian?

In his report Three-Year Assessment [of struggle], Ashraf revisited a sensitive topic which he had raised in his previous, One-Year Assessment of Urban and Rural Guerrilla Struggle (Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh). Back in April/May 1971, referring to the Siyahkal assault, he had presented a series of explanatory factors for the “total destruction of the mountain group”. Ashraf was critical of the lack of decisiveness/aggressivity (qate’aneh) displayed by the mountain team when faced with the villagers. He

suggested that one of the reasons the guerrillas had been defeated was because of their hesitation to use violence. He condemned his comrades for their refusal to “behave roughly (khashen) and militarily”, resulting in their arrest. Ashraf asserted that “forcefulness and decisiveness/aggressiveness were the guarantors of the safety and survival of the guerrillas, not mildness/gentleness (molayemat) and tenderness (molatefat).”³⁵

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In 1971–1972, the regime struck serious blows against the Fada’is, causing heavy losses. Soon it became known that SAVAK’s information about the time and place of secret meetings and the whereabouts of safe houses was obtained from Fada’is under torture. The guerrillas were now confronted with unintended threats from fellow guerrillas under pressure. The continuous loss of key figures through information obtained under torture raised a constellation of sensitive issues. How long can or should an arrested guerrilla hold out under torture? How should members in a safe house behave and interact so that they would have the least amount of hard information about one another? How should breaches in security by guerrillas and violations of team discipline be dealt with? In Three-Year Assessment [of struggle], Hamid Ashraf came down hard on those who “breached security”, calling for stiff retribution. To transition from a loose band of rebels to a well-disciplined and professional corps “à la Che” which would be capable of survival and expansion, Ashraf advocated the punishment of death for what he considered “treasonous acts” by guerrilla members.

Secrecy was the key to successful clandestine operations. Guerrillas needed to guard team and group secrets with their lives. This was why a guerrilla was inducted into the organization when he or she was given a cyanide pill. Once the crucial decision had been made and the final step of going into a safe house was taken, members became exposed to other team members, plans, locations, and vital information about the guerrillas. A change of heart and the decision to leave the Group could pose deadly security breaches. To avoid vulnerability from within, Ashraf called for the ultimate penalty.

Around June 1971, ‘Abbas Meftahi handed over a recruit to ‘Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari. Oranous Pourhasan, a medical student determined to engage in guerrilla activities, had requested entering military action and was assigned to a safe house. Subsequently, Pourhasan left his Fada’i safe house without informing his comrades and went back to Tabriz. ‘Abbas Meftahi considered him a traitor who should be executed, and Hamid Ashraf suggested sending a team to Tabriz

to “execute” (e’ dam) the traitor. But Mas’oud Ahmadzadeh disagreed with the execution proposal, and the operation was discarded. Ashraf reports on this event and his personal position on the topic in his Three-Year Assessment.³⁶

▪

To preserve the Fada’i Organization, Ashraf was not forgiving and could even be brutal towards anyone who divulged information leading to the arrest of other guerrillas and dismantling of teams and safe houses. He passed the harshest judgement on ‘Abdol-Manaf Falaki, a committed Fada’i whose capture led to the arrest of Mas’oud Ahmadzadeh. Ashraf wrote, “There is no doubt that anyone who tattles on his rendezvous/meeting (qarar) with another comrade is a traitor.” Ashraf conceded that divulging information under torture may constitute weakness, but to him, information that led to “the arrest and torture of another comrade was treason”.³⁷

▪

In the eyes of old admirers and enthusiasts of the Fada’is, who later became their opponents and critics, there was something fundamentally wrong with Hamid Ashraf’s leadership. Some ten years after the death of Ashraf, the journal of the “Organization of Communist Unity” (Sazeman-e vahdat-e komonisti) accused Ashraf of being a double-faced (do rou) Maoist and Stalinist. The “Organization of Communist Unity”, an outgrowth of the old Star Group, was critical of Ashraf and the Fada’i Organization on two grounds. They criticized the internal executions of the Fada’is and their relations with the Soviet Union, around September/October 1975.³⁸

▪

Ashraf was depicted as an authoritarian despot who made unscrupulous secret decisions and imposed his will on his inexperienced and impressionable lieutenants. Ashraf and the Fada’is were charged with being undemocratic and manipulative.³⁹

▪

Hamid Ashraf had the charisma to foster a cult of personality around himself, but he steered away from it. To the extent possible, given the nature of an underground revolutionary organization, he sought and complied with the majority decision of the leadership team. It is said that, for example, Ashraf had been against the decision of the Mashhad branch to assassinate Hoseyn Nahidi, the chief interrogator of Mashhad’s SAVAK (3 February 1976), and to explode a

bomb in Khorasan's Office of Labour and Social Affairs (2 May 1976). Faced with the arguments and decision of the Mashhad branch, Ashraf had made his counterarguments, and finally conceded to the will of the majority in favour of the operations.⁴⁰

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Notes

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Ahmad Ashraf, personal correspondence, 24 and 25 May 2019.

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Ashraf, personal correspondence, 24 and 25 May 2019.

3

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P. (wishes to remain anonymous), private interview, 28 July 2015, Tehran. For a short biography of Ashraf, see: http://hamid-ashraf.com/home/?page_id=248

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(retrieved 14 May 2019), and A. Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 1, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008, pp. 96–103.

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Ahmad Ashraf, personal correspondence, 21 August 2019.

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Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

[6](#)

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Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

[7](#)

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Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

[8](#)

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A. Ashraf, personal correspondence, 27 May 2019.

[9](#)

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Negahdar, personal interview, 7 June 2016.

[10](#)

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The two paragraphs on the “big room” are based on Falakhan, no. 38, Asghar Izadi; Asghar Izadi, “man marg ra didam”; personal conversation with Asghar Izadi, 9 May 2019; Same ‘ in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 136.

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For Fariborz Sanjari's different account see: <http://www.siahkal.com/index/mid-col/molahezati-dar-bareh-navashteh-Izadi.htm>

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(retrieved 3 June 2019).

12

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Sheyda Nabavi in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 304.

13

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The information in the these descriptive paragraphs is based on testimonies and interrogation reports: *Fasnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi*, shomareh 57, vol. 2, Tabestan 1396, pp. 73–74, 76–90, 95–100, 103–105, 107, 120, 121; Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 304, 309, 312; Heydar Tabrizi, p. 76; A. Hashemi, *Az birahehha-ye rah*, vol. 2, Hanover: Goftegouha-ye زندان, 1396, pp. 137–141.

14

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Fasnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 107.

15

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Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), p. 31; chapter four (baykot), pp. 12, 42.

[16](#)

▪

Qane‘ifard, p. 248.

[17](#)

▪

Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 51.

[18](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 49.

[19](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 55. The actual quote is: “The only yardstick of the truth is the revolutionary practice of millions of people” (“On New Democracy”, January 1940), Marxist internet Archive, http://marxists.anu.edu.au/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm

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(retrieved 22 June 2019).

[20](#)

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Ashraf, Jamʻbandi-e seh saleh, p. 52.

[21](#)

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Ashraf, Jamʻbandi-e seh saleh, p. 56.

[22](#)

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Ashraf, Jamʻbandi-e seh saleh, p. 56.

[23](#)

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Ashraf, Jamʻbandi-e seh saleh, pp. 57–58, 81–85.

[24](#)

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Ashraf, Jamʻbandi-e seh saleh, pp. 56–59.

[25](#)

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Ashraf, Jamʻbandi-e seh saleh, p. 59; Heydar Tabrizi, p. 20.

[26](#)

▪

Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), pp. 61–64.

[27](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 60.

[28](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 60, 69, 80.

[29](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 79.

[30](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 66–67.

[31](#)

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Ashraf, Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 78, 79.

[32](#)

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Ashraf, Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 79–80.

[33](#)

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Ashraf, Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 64–65.

[34](#)

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Heydar Tabrizi, p. 22.

[35](#)

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, p. 22.

[36](#)

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Ashraf, Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, pp. 67–69; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 377–380.

[37](#)

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Ashraf, Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, p. 74.

[38](#)

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These topics will be dealt with in Chapter 25.

[39](#)

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Andisheh-e Raha'i, no. 6, Esfand 1365, pp. 121–124.

[40](#)

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Hashemi, vol. 2, pp. 140–141.

Hemming the Guerrillas or Cultivating a Guerrilla Culture?

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Towards the end of 1971, urban armed struggle escalated further as the Islamic guerrillas made their debut on the political scene. To uproot the nascent armed struggle movement, the Shah ordered the establishment of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee (Komiteh-ye moshtarak-e zedd-e kharabkari). This Joint Committee, born on 24 January 1972, was to pool and coordinate the forces of SAVAK, the National Police, and the Gendarmerie to uproot all urban guerrillas.¹

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According to the Joint Committee's first director, General Ja'far-Qoli Sadri, the idea of such a body had come from the Shah immediately after the attack on Qolhak Police Station and the assassination of General Farsiyou.²

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However, under pressure from the Shah for quick results, SAVAK and the National Police began competing with one another. Each vied to outdo the other in hunting down dissidents and guerrillas. Their rivalry over recognition and credit led to major discord and even open clashes between the two main security organizations. The jealousies between the two bodies resulted in intentional disruption in security operations, hampering the eradication of the guerrillas.³

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On 24 May 1973, Nasiri and his strongmen managed to monopolize all security-related issues in the hands of SAVAK.⁴

▪

The Shah hoped that by giving full control to SAVAK in all domains, internal and external, he would put an end to the divisiveness within the security organizations, especially the Police (shahrbani) and SAVAK. The Shah decided, therefore, to place the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee under the supervision and control of SAVAK. With greater power, came greater accountability to the person of the Shah. SAVAK needed to demonstrate that it was on top of the guerrilla activities to keep the Shah happy.

One can surmise that from May 1973, SAVAK obtained effectively absolute authority and control over a vast domain of state powers. In the field of hunting down political dissidents and guerrillas and the choice of interrogation techniques, SAVAK was given wider latitude. It obtained broader control over the content and reporting of security-related news and information in the press and on the National Iranian Radio and Television networks. Judicial matters concerning the conduct and outcome of political trials and the final sentencing of political prisoners fell under its purview. In a significant move, SAVAK was placed at the helm of managing political prisons and administrating the affairs of political prisoners. Finally, SAVAK obtained full jurisdiction over the surveillance and overseeing of Iranian students abroad, and especially the Confederation of Iranian Students.

This carte blanche given to SAVAK's directors produced an avalanche of human rights violations and prisoner abuses, the scale and scope of which could not be kept hidden for long. Reports began to leak out about these abuses and proved to be the Achilles heel of the regime. SAVAK's unlimited powers, and yet limited success when dealing with the guerrillas in 1973–1974, compelled it to resort to creative crisis management. When guerrilla cells could not be discovered and dismantled, or firing teams could not be destroyed, SAVAK began to invent situations. A sinister fictive plot against national interests had to be fabricated and its members pre-emptively arrested. An entire fictitious frame-up was elaborated and trumpeted to demonstrate the efficiency of SAVAK.

▪

The Shah declares the end of terrorist activities in Iran

On 27 September 1973, four months after SAVAK consolidated its hold over the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee, the Shah made an astonishing public statement. The headline of the daily Ettela'at read: "Problem posed by terrorist groups in Iran comes to an end". This extraordinary affirmation appeared on the top half of the front page.⁵

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The Shah's exact words were: "Today, we can no longer talk about urban guerrillas or terrorist groups, since this topic is way too childish and ridiculous. Now, this situation has come to an end, and there is no longer any news of it." The Shah must have received assurances from the top brass of his security apparatus to make such a spectacular statement and commit himself publicly to it. In January 1973, the British Embassy in Iran reported that the Shah had confided to an interlocutor, "there were no longer any guerrillas in Iran."⁶

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To avoid embarrassment for the Shah, SAVAK had to justify his majesty's claims by manipulating all news about the guerrillas. The public had to be convinced that the guerrilla movement had been uprooted as the Shah had claimed. During six whole months, from 27 September 1973 to 20 March 1974, SAVAK concealed all actual news related to guerrilla activities by keeping it out of the press, while releasing reports on the "saboteurs" involved in a fabricated assassination plot. The purpose was to prove that SAVAK not only had full knowledge of the activities of all armed groups, but it was also futile and suicidal to engage in such activities.

•

The Golesorkhi affair

Less than a week after the Shah's highly optimistic statement, Iranians were informed that a group of saboteurs/terrorists (kharabkar) had been arrested. On 2 October 1973, the news of a sinister plot appeared in huge print on the top part of the front page of Ettela'at. In a much-touted and hyped three-day campaign, the press broke the news that the security authorities (SAVAK) had uncovered and arrested twelve highly dangerous members of an anarchist-Marxist group of saboteurs involved in a plot against the life of the Shah, the Queen, and the Crown Prince.⁷

•

In a concerted and carefully orchestrated show of affection for the Shah, a massive wave of pro-Shah letters poured in. First, they came from various academic groups and university bodies. Then various guilds, firms, government organizations, individuals, and provincial communes chipped in generously. These letters condemned the treacherous efforts of the saboteurs and gave thanks for the safety of the Shah. This well-engineered outpouring of national affection was to produce the impression that not only students, but the nation at large, abhorred the perpetrators of the so-called conspiracy against the royal family.

Members of the Iranian parliament referred to the plot as a major event and implored the people to protect the Shah from such conspiracies. The media reported on special prayer gatherings held in Tehran, Qom, and Mashhad, where the people and the clergy gave thanks for the averted danger. The press denounced the conspirators vehemently and spoke of the great tragedy that would have occurred had it not been for the efforts of the security authorities. The whole country was made to seem united behind its King, and its ever-alert security apparatus.

This three-day ballyhoo trumpeted the omnipotence of SAVAK and its ability to penetrate and undo even the most "frightful conspiracies". The press, under instructions from SAVAK, gave the impression that the monarchy had been saved and the culprits had all confessed to their crimes. The trial of the twelve defendants opened more than three months later. On 6 January 1974, in a snow-covered Tehran, twelve political prisoners faced three counts of plotting to kill the Shah and one count of plotting to kidnap the Queen and the Crown Prince.⁸

•

Back on 20 September 1973, twelve days before the press revealed the assassination story, Nasiri had met with 'Alam. SAVAK's number one man

informed the Minister of Court that SAVAK had “discovered a network planning to assassinate the Crown Prince”.⁹

•

At the time, Nasiri did not mention a plot against the Shah and the Queen.

To boast its mastery of controlling the security situation, SAVAK concocted a case. It accused a group of writers, poets, cameramen, film directors, film producers, and journalists of belonging to a subversive group that was actively plotting against the royal family. SAVAK assumed that, under considerable pressure and torture, the armchair dissidents would break down and confess to crimes they had not committed.

The scenario seemed flawless. After the smooth-running show trial, the military tribunal, acting on SAVAK’s directive, was initially to mete out death sentences to a few, while handing very light terms to others. This would demonstrate the fairness of the Iranian judicial system. During their defence, the defendants were expected to demonstrate remorse, speak affectionately of the Shah and the royal family and, each in his own way, implore clemency. According to the plan, the appellate court was to hear the second round of repentant defences, then uphold some of the harsh sentences. The plot would build to its climax, and as prisoners were preparing to be executed, the benevolent Shah would intervene, and commute the death sentences.

The trial had been made public to assure the full impact of the scheme. Domestic and foreign journalists and photographers were invited to attend. The National Iranian Radio and Television network recorded the court proceedings. The Iranian public was to witness and learn from the pitiful consequence of intellectuals playing with fire. The decision to open a political trial in a military tribunal to the public and the press demonstrated the regime’s certitude that the show would proceed as planned.

One day before the news of the plot was made public, ‘Alam had a meeting with the Shah. He questioned the wisdom of publicizing the news of the assassination plot against the Shah, the Queen, and the Crown Prince. In ‘Alam’s eyes, the attempt was just the work of “a few foolish kids”. The Shah informed ‘Alam that the news had to be publicized, “because they were going to go on trial”. When ‘Alam questioned the benefit of this course of action, the Shah curtly responded, “It is expedient, and you just don’t get it (to nemifahmi).”¹⁰

▪

This trial, which was supposed to endear the Shah to his people and demonize the saboteurs, turned into a fiasco.

Those facing trial were Teyfour Batha'i, Khosrow Golesorkhi, Manouchehr Moqaddam-Salimi, Keramatollah Daneshiyan, 'Abbas Samakar, Reza 'Allamehzadeh, Iraj Jamshidi, Ebrahim Farhang-Razi, Shokouh Farhang (Mirzadegi), Maryam Ettehadiyah, Morteza Siyahpoush, and Farhad Qeysari. On the fourth day of the trial, Khosrow Golesorkhi began his defence. His powerful words turned the tables, making it a trial of the regime. Golesorkhi's emotionally charged and passionate prosecution of the regime was followed by an equally compelling, and ideological, but less moving appeal by Daneshiyan.

Golesorkhi, a poet and a writer, had just turned thirty. He was arrested on 28 March 1973 at his place of work, the Keyhan newspaper. Golesorkhi was a socially and politically conscious intellectual of the left, and like many intellectuals of the time, he used the power of words to speak against the political system in place. Two years before his arrest, and right after Siyahkal, around summer of 1971, Golesorkhi had raised the possibility of the Shah's assassination while speaking with two friends, Manouchehr Moqaddam-Salimi and Shokouh Farhang. Since that summer of 1971, Golesorkhi had taken no specific steps to concretize the talk, and the idea had been abandoned. It should be noted that in the 1970s, talk of assassinating the Shah was not uncommon among politicized dissidents, militant intellectuals, and university students. Talking about killing the Shah, especially after Siyahkal had radicalized the public mood, was usually nothing more than venting political frustrations and expressing wishful thoughts. The gap between talk and action was considerable.

In March 1973, at the time of his arrest, Golesorkhi was involved with a Marxist study circle composed of 'Atefeh Gorgin and Manouchehr Moqaddam-Salimi, and perhaps Shokouh Farhang. Five days after Golesorkhi's arrest, Moqaddam-Salimi was arrested. 'Atefeh Gorgin, Golesorkhi's wife, was arrested eight days after her husband.¹¹

▪

Around three months into Golesorkhi's imprisonment, on around 13 June 1973, 'Allamehzadeh and Samakar, strangers to Golesorkhi, had a chat about kidnapping the Queen or the Crown Prince and using them as leverage to obtain the release of certain political prisoners.¹²

▪
Neither ‘Allamehzadeh nor Samakar, who were free at the time, were in any way connected to or associated with Golesorkhi.

Out of his eleven so-called co-conspirators, Golesorkhi knew only Shokouh Farhang, Ebrahim Farhang-Razi (Shokouh’s husband), Maryam Ettehadiyeh, and Morteza Siyahpoush, who worked at Keyhan. He had also known Manouchehr Moqaddam-Salimi since 1972. He did not know the remaining five so-called co-conspirators. According to ‘Atefeh Gorgin and Teyfour Batha’i, it was Shokouh Farhang who had mentioned Golesorkhi’s name, and his once upon a time idea of assassinating the Shah to the authorities.¹³

▪
Colonel Hashem Niyabati, Shokouh Farhang’s lawyer at her trial, pointed out that only after the arrest of Shokouh Farhang did the authorities learn about this group.¹⁴

▪
Shokouh Farhang, in turn, was arrested in connection with Batha’i, one of the “conspirators”. Upon information provided by Farhang, SAVAK had welded together two distinct circles to forge an exciting plot against the life of the royal family. While in prison, Golesorkhi was fused with Daneshiyan, Batha’i, ‘Allamehzadeh, and Samakar on the outside. The latter four knew one another since their days at the Film School of the Iranian National Television.

▪
Revolutionaries of the Film School of the Iranian National Television

‘Abbas Samakar, Reza ‘Allamehzadeh, and Keramatollah Daneshiyan were classmates at the newly founded Film School of the Iranian National Television (Madreseh-e ‘aliy-e television va cinema). The three had entered the Film School in the fall of 1968, when it operated out of rented buildings on Fereshteh

Street, in northern Tehran. A year later the Film School was officially recognized as an institution of higher education by the Ministry of Sciences and Higher Education.¹⁵

▪

It was at the Film School that a strong bond of friendship developed between the three, even though Daneshiyan dropped out after his first year. The close friendship and professional affinity between 'Allamehzadeh and Samakar continued after their graduation.

Around June 1973, 'Allamehzadeh had come across the news that Ne'matollah (Davood) Eyvaz Mohammadi, a close classmate from his high school years, had been sentenced to death by the military tribunal for political activities. Shocked and deeply upset, he first thought of making a passionate speech in defence of political prisoners and against torture while being introduced to the Queen. At the 8th International Film Festival for Children and Young Adults, 'Allamehzadeh was to be honoured for his film Daar.

In June 1973, 'Allamehzadeh shared his idea with Samakar, and one idea led to the next. The topic of kidnapping the Queen or the Crown Prince was broached. In return for the safe release of the Queen and Crown Prince, they thought of demanding the freedom of a few political prisoners. It is most telling that at the time of their arrest, 'Allamehzadeh thought that they had talked about kidnapping the Queen, while Samakar thought they had spoken about kidnapping the Crown Prince.¹⁶

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Samakar subsequently discussed the matter with Teyfour Batha'i, another graduate of the Film School, whom 'Allamehzadeh did not know very well. Batha'i in turn spoke about the kidnapping idea as a "plan" to Keramatollah Daneshiyan. Sometime in July 1973, Daneshiyan was informed of the "plan". The "plan", however, as in a "telephone game", was the garbled version of 'Allamehzadeh's venting. It was far from 'Allamehzadeh's original and rather innocent idea of reading a statement in support of political prisoners and condemning torture in the presence of the Queen.¹⁷

▪

In the spring of 1973, Daneshiyan had formed a political circle including his old friend Yousef Aliyari, and Amir-Hoseyn Fetanat. The circle was interested in

undertaking some sort of radical political operation. Once Batha'i was transferred to Shiraz, he and Daneshiyan began discussing anti-regime operations. It was also in Shiraz that Batha'i met Shokouh Farhang and introduced her to Daneshiyan. By the summer of 1973, Shokouh Farhang was told that the circle around Daneshiyan was thinking of a kidnapping operation. This was in fact 'Allamehzadeh and Samakar's idea.

'Allamehzadeh's initial idea entered a more a serious phase when Samakar asked Batha'i for a pistol in preparation for the kidnapping project. The thought of kidnapping the Queen or the Crown Prince with a single pistol throws some light on the seriousness of the plan. In search of a pistol, Batha'i turned to Daneshiyan, and Daneshiyan turned to his friend Fetanat. Iraj Jamshidi, a friend of Shokouh Farhang, was given the responsibility of picking up the gun from Fetanat. On the day of the meeting, Jamshidi lost heart at the last minute and did not show up at the meeting.

SAVAK was not only informed of the planned exchange of the pistol but had arranged for it to happen through one of its informers. It was Amir-Hoseyn Fetanat, Daneshiyan's trusted friend from his prison year in 1970, who had turned informant and was now posing as a member of the Fada'i guerrillas. When Daneshiyan turned to Fetanat for a pistol, Fetanat informed his SAVAK handler in Shiraz, Mr Arman. From that moment on, SAVAK began plotting what it believed would become a sensational story depicting its impregnable prowess in defending the crown and the country.¹⁸

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Through Fetanat, SAVAK knew of the "Film School" circle and the Daneshiyan circle.

When Jamshidi failed to pick up the pistol, SAVAK, wary that Fetanat's cover had been blown, proceeded to round up its victims. SAVAK ended up parading twelve "dangerous saboteurs" threatening the life of the King, Queen, and the Crown Prince. The deadly terrorists, however, did not have a single weapon between them. Furthermore, SAVAK was unable to prove collusion and deliberation among the twelve, since some members of this so-called group were not even aware of the existence, let alone plans, of the others. Some had been in prison, while others seemed to be mulling over the idea of a kidnapping. It may be surmised that Shokouh Farhang's disclosures were used by SAVAK to bridge the two distinct groups – members of the "Keyhan" and the "Film School"

circles. Daneshiyan and Batha'i did intend to connect their circle of friends to the Fada'i guerrillas, yet they were nowhere close to establishing any formal contact with them.

It would be fair to say that all twelve had strong sympathies for armed struggle and the Fada'i guerrillas. The most militant in the "Film School" group was probably Daneshiyan. According to Aliyari, after Daneshiyan's release from prison around April 1971, the two old friends had obtained and read the works of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh. They had subsequently embraced Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh's path and had sought to contact the Fada'is.¹⁹

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Slaying heroes: Fuel on fire

The moving and penetrating defence statements of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan during their trial were neither fully reported in the press nor aired at the time. SAVAK controlled the press and the government radio and television networks. However, its decision to make the trials public meant that word of what was said in court got around quickly. In court, Golesorkhi spoke serenely, forcefully, and poetically. Drawing on the revolutionary repertoire of Islam and Marxism, he told the court that he was a Marxist-Leninist who had first discovered the concept of social justice in Islam. Drawing attention to his own case, Golesorkhi exposed the trial as a farce, and posited that unsubstantiated political accusations and charges were common in his country.

In Iran, he eloquently pointed out, prisons were filled with young people who had been arrested, tortured, and imprisoned for "thinking, reflecting, and reading books". Once they were out of prison, he added, these same people "cast off the book and picked up the machine-gun". Golesorkhi spoke about his own treatment in prison. He informed the court that he had been tortured until he had pissed blood. Calling attention to censorship in the country, he accused the regime of using medieval methods of "inquisition and thought inspection",

accompanied by “terrorizing thoughts and ideas”. Golesorkhi’s words were a bold indictment of the regime rather than a personal defence statement.

In a transcendental, mystical, and rebellious moment, probably the highlight of his speech, Golesorkhi took the moral high ground, reminding the prosecution that he knew that the price of naked political truth in Iran was one’s life. Calmly yet categorically, Golesorkhi told the judge, “I am not here to haggle over my life.”²⁰

▪

This simple message resonated with many Iranians. It became a popular mantra among politicized Iranians, depicting the mental state of those who dared to stand up to an undemocratic and despotic regime. In the tradition of Hallaj, Golesorkhi smiled at death, held his head up high, mocked the powers that be who had put him on trial, and defied them by offering his blood.

When Golesorkhi’s defence was cut short by the president of the military court, the unarmed rebel retorted, “If I do not have the freedom to speak, I will sit.” And he sat down. In front of the cameras, the revolutionary poet invited martyrdom. True to his claim, Golesorkhi turned down all offers made by the authorities to apologize or recant in return for his life. According to Morteza Siyahpoush, Golesorkhi indignantly told Hormoz Ayromlou (alias Dadras), their chief interrogator: “Mister Interrogator, I will do what it takes, so that you have no choice but to execute me.”²¹

▪

The twenty-seven-year-old Keramatollah Daneshiyan completed Golesorkhi’s indictment against the regime. Daneshiyan accused the regime of imposing “an invisible martial law” which required a massive, expensive, and unproductive army, squandering substantial resources. He posited that the regime in Iran had no other “responsibility than to repress all voices of liberation”. Daneshiyan reminded the court that it would be wrong to think that “arresting a small group, torturing, imprisoning, and executing them”, would guarantee their success in silencing such voices. He ascertained that the movement in Iran had not stalled, and that it was the ruling clique’s turn to prepare its last defence. The president of the military court prevented Daneshiyan from completing his defence. Daneshiyan’s last words were, “I have a few lines left to end my last defence, in which I endorse the armed struggle...”²²

▪

The appellate court resumed after deliberation, this time in the absence of journalists or TV cameras. In an almost empty hall, with only the twelve defendants and a few SAVAK and military personnel in attendance, the court clerk read out the sentences. When he pronounced the death sentence for Golesorkhi, the accused yelled out, "Death to the Shah!" The clerk continued, and as soon as he pronounced Daneshiyan's death sentence, he too yelled out, "Death to the Shah!"²³

•

The defence of these two individuals turned the tables. The accusers stood condemned before public opinion. The court had been made public for SAVAK to put on display a bunch of broken and recanting intellectual revolutionaries. Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan took advantage of this unique opportunity to mark a major victory for the cause of the anti-Shah movement and the guerrillas, striking an irreversible ethical blow against the regime. The two men forced the hands of the regime, just as the guerrillas had done, by sacrificing themselves. SAVAK had not anticipated having to execute any of the twelve. On the contrary, an important aspect of the show had been to display mercy and grace.²⁴

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Confronted with a defiant Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan, and frustrated with their refusal to apologize or recant, and most importantly, outraged with their passionate defence of armed struggle, SAVAK resorted to brutality to save face. Golesorkhi's reliance on revolutionary Islam and Marxism in his discourse appealed to a broad segment of the population. The execution of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan, who had won the hearts and minds of not only the politicized youth, but many apolitical Iranians, made heroes and martyrs of them. Their fervour and subsequent execution made them the non-combatant archetype of the guerrilla movement. They won their place in the guerrilla movement to which they emotionally belonged. They too had become teachers of defiance and insurgency.

On Thursday, 24 January 1974, the press reported that the appellate court had condemned to death five of the twelve defendants: Khosrow Golesorkhi, Keramatollah Daneshiyan, Teyfour Batha'i, Mohammad-Reza 'Allamehzadeh, and 'Abbas Samakar.²⁵

•

On Saturday, 26 January, protesting the trial and sentencing of Golesorkhi,

Daneshiyan, and their co-defendants, students at Tehran University went on an unprecedented offensive. Their prolonged demonstrations led to a bloody police attack on the students, and the closure of Tehran University.²⁶

▪

High school students in Tehran joined in the protests. Slogans began appearing on the walls in support of the five condemned, as well as in support of the armed struggle movement.²⁷

▪

On 17 February 1974, news of the Shah's gracious pardon of Teyfour Batha'i, Mohammad-Reza 'Allamehzadeh, and 'Abbas Samakar, all three condemned to death, was splashed on the front page of Ettela'at. Under instructions from SAVAK, the newspapers did not mention that Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan would face the firing squad at dawn of 18 February 1974.²⁸

▪

Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan became the rebellious little black fish of Samad Behrangi's tale. They stood up obstinately to the predator fish-eating bird, and then disappeared.

After their execution, even at bourgeois dinner tables, toasts were made to Khosrow Golesorkhi, "who remained steadfast to his word and became a martyr".²⁹

▪

One political prisoner recalled how Golesorkhi became a legend even for the prison guards.³⁰

▪

The message conveyed by Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan was another version of what was being preached by the guerrilla movement. This message, well appreciated by ever growing numbers, was that political change required boldness, defiance, and non-compliance.

Notes

[1](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 52.

[2](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 19 Esfand 1357, reproduced in Hasanpour, pp. 53–54. Sadri’s defence statement during his trial after the 1979 revolution.

[3](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 19 Esfand 1357.

[4](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 55.

[5](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 5 Mehr 1352.

[6](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2050, NBP 1/3, “Political situation in Iran, 1973”.

[7](#)

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Ettela‘at, 10, 11, 12 Mehr 1352. From 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24 Mehr, there were random telegrams which were probably paid for as advertisements.

[8](#)

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Ettela‘at, 16 Dey 1352.

[9](#)

•

‘Alikhani, vol. 3, p. 175.

[10](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 2, p. 191.

[11](#)

•

‘Atefeh Gorgin, Majaleh, Farsi, <https://far.majalla.com/node/62951/>

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(retrieved 12 December 2018); Parsine, <https://www.parsine.com/fa/news/17321/>

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(retrieved 10 October 2018).

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This date is based on the announcement of Ne‘matollah (Davood) Eyvaz Mohammadi’s death sentence in the Iranian press. See R. ‘Allamehzadeh, *Dasti dar honar, cheshmi bar siyasat*, Los Angeles: Ketab Corp., 2012, pp. 29, 31.

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‘Atefeh Gorgin, Majaleh; A. Samakar, *Man yek shoureshi hastam*, Tehran: Entesharat-e mehrandish, 1382, pp. 150–151, 196.

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Keyhan Hava’i, 29 Dey 1352, in Samakar, *Man yek shoureshi hastam*, p. 196.

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I am grateful to Reza ‘Allamehzadeh for clarifying this point as the inauguration date of the Film School is usually cited as 13 April 1969 (24 Farvardin 1348). Personal correspondence, 10 March 2019; ‘Allamehzadeh, p. 13.

[16](#)

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‘Allamehzadeh, pp. 30–31, 36; Samakar, *Man yek shoureshi hastam*, p. 109.

[17](#)

▪

‘Allamehzadeh, p. 30.

[18](#)

▪

Samakar, *Man yek shoureshi hastam*, pp. 38, 48, 53, 98–99, 111, 172–173, 260. A-H. *Fetanat, Yek fenjan chay-e bi moqe*’, Tehran: Entesharat-e mehrandish, 1393, pp. 85, 95–99, 127; A. Salehi, *Ravi-e baharan*, Tehran: Nashr-e qatreh, 1382, pp. 137–149, 172–174; ‘Allamehzadeh, pp. 28, 42–43, 50; A. Samakar, *Penhan dar posht-e khod*, Sweden: *Ketab-i arzan*, 2015, pp. 15, 20, 26, 51; T. Batha’i, *Safar-e khiyal*, Sweden: *Khaneh-ye honar va adabiyat*, 1396, pp. 65, 69.

[19](#)

▪

Samakar, *Man yek shoureshi hastam*, p. 98; Batha’i, pp. 60–61; Salehi, *Ravi-e baharan*, pp. 117, 128.

[20](#)

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Samakar, pp. 200–203. Based on Golesorkhi’s defence statement at court.

[21](#)

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Morteza Siyahpoush, personal correspondence, 10 January 2019. On Ayromlou see Samakar, Penhan da posht-e khod, http://bazaferinieazad.blogspot.com/2016_03_18_archive.html

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(retrieved 15 February 2019).

[22](#)

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Samakar, pp. 205–207.

[23](#)

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‘Allamehzadeh, p. 84.

[24](#)

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Qane‘ifard, pp. 290–291.

[25](#)

▪

Ettela'at, 4 Bahman 1352.

[26](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 51, Esfand 1352.

[27](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 2, Farvardin 1353.

[28](#)

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Ettela'at, 28 Bahman 1352.

[29](#)

•

Showkat, Goftegou ba Kourosh Lasha'i, p. 232.

[30](#)

•

Qobadi, chapter three (shouresh-e bi dalil), p. 113.

Jazani's Questioning of Armed Struggle

Somewhere between January and September 1973, the Fada'is were consolidating and rapidly expanding their teams both in Tehran and the provinces. Almost at the same time, Bijan Jazani had begun rethinking the political conditions in Iran. At Qasr prison, he evaluated the achievements and shortcomings of the armed struggle movement and suggested a new road map for the movement. The evolution of his thoughts was reflected in two important works. The first phase of his intellectual re-evaluation was reflected in an approximately 35,000-word pamphlet called *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* (Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad). By one account, this treatise was written between winter and spring 1973 (zemestan-e 1351 va bahar-e 1352) at Qasr prison.¹

According to another account, it was written around September/October 1973 (avaset-e 1352).²

Challenging the theory and practice of the Fada'is

In *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*, Jazani reported on the emergence of different opinions and approaches among the proponents of armed struggle. These divergences, he suggested, were over the characteristics of the ongoing movement and its future in terms of strategy and tactics. He announced that the purpose of his treatise was to resolve these differences.³

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From prison, Jazani was challenging the hegemonic line of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh, and most importantly the revolutionary practitioners operating under the leadership of Hamid Ashraf. He was questioning the prevailing perception among the Fada'is that armed struggle was both the strategy and tactic of the revolutionary movement.

Jazani was trying to reclaim the position of the senior and seasoned theoretical leader of the Marxist revolutionary struggle. He counselled “all progressive forces [to move] towards a single revolutionary outlook” and called on them to arrive at a “unified ideological, strategic and tactical stance”. To this end, he called for “an ideological struggle within the working-class revolutionary movement”.⁴

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To him, this was an “incessant” in-house ideological struggle to the bitter end. He warned that he would not concede to the “unprincipled” mediation of certain “arbitrators”.⁵

•

Jazani observed that the existing vanguard of the revolutionary movement was “principally” led by “intellectual and conscious elements of the petty bourgeoisie”. He emphasized that “at this time, a revolutionary and experienced working-class vanguard did not exist in society”.⁶

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Intentionally or not, Jazani labelled the leadership of the ongoing armed struggle movement as petty-bourgeois intellectuals. He subsequently drew upon the damning battle cries of Marxist–Leninists going to war against one another to demonstrate how “petty-bourgeois” ideas of armed struggle would lead eventually to “adventurism”, “dogmatism”, “heroism”, “terrorism”, “deviation”,

“sectarianism”, “vanguardism”, “sensationalism”, and finally “left-wing infantile disorder”.⁷

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The use of traditional Tudeh Party epitaphs to highlight the future of the Fada'i leadership's deviation demonstrated the intensity of the campaign Jazani was conducting from prison. He advocated the abandonment of the hegemonic Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh line of thought in favour of his own. Jazani was disputing the ideological veracity and legitimacy of the leadership, which was conducting armed struggle. He was claiming the mantle of the working-class ideologue and the leadership of the revolutionary movement from afar.

Jazani's core criticism was that, after some two years, the armed struggle movement had failed to expand beyond “limited progressive currents” and become a mass struggle. He believed that it was this problem which was “casting doubt on the armed struggle movement”. In his writing, Jazani questioned the way armed struggle had been conducted by the Fada'is, and pronounced the movement to be in crisis. He accused the revolutionaries who did not see eye to eye with him of “not possessing a revolutionary theory or failing to have a correct understanding of armed struggle”.⁸

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Jazani wrote that those who “do not have a proper understanding of the actual armed struggle in [relation to the] preparation for the revolution may themselves be involved in the armed struggle”. He reprimanded the revolutionary practitioners for “failing to possess a strategic view in relation to the struggle underway”. In a polemical tone, Jazani ridiculed the vanguard and lectured them on Marxism. He wrote, “Obviously every beginner in Marxism knows the difference between the struggle of the vanguard groups and the struggle which involves the broad masses.”⁹

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For Jazani to challenge from prison the way armed struggle was conducted by the revolutionaries on the ground was a bold move. To prove his theoretical supremacy, and justify his status as a worthy contender, Jazani reminded his audience of his credentials. To the political prisoners at Qasr, sympathetic to the cause of the Fada'is, Jazani presented himself as one “who was equipped with a revolutionary theory”, and one of the “founders of armed resistance”. He put himself forward as the true Marxist–Leninist theoretician, who for the good of

the movement was disputing Ahmadzadeh's outmoded pure method of armed struggle. Jazani appeared as "the reformer" and "the revolutionizer of the ideas of old comrades". He intimated that as the true ideologue of the working-class movement, he was proposing "an appropriate form" of armed struggle based on a combination of "old" and "new" modes of struggle. His new solution promised to transform armed struggle into a mass struggle.¹⁰

▪

Jazani sought direct confrontation but without naming names. Outright collision with Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Ashraf would have quickly resulted in him being ostracized from the community of revolutionary Marxists. Jazani hinted, and insinuated, therefore, presenting his most radical ideas enigmatically, even ambiguously. For example, Jazani carped and warned that delving into yesterday's treatise to seek solutions for today's problems would lead to dogmatism, bring the struggle to a dead-end, and fail to attain the original ideals of the struggle.¹¹

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He left it to his reader to deduce that yesterday's treatise was a reference to Ahmadzadeh's work, an unnamed target of his attacks.

Jazani's solution, for a successful transition from armed struggle by a vanguard to a broad mass movement, was rooted in his own political experience. Jazani's ideal organizational structure and method of struggle was modelled on the set-up of his own group before its dismantlement. Until his arrest in January 1968, Jazani's Group comprised two branches, the political/propaganda branch and the operational/military branch. Before his arrest, Jazani was just as intent on political, guild, and propaganda work as he was on armed struggle. The experience of his group, from inception to arrest, had demonstrated that it was far more successful in peaceful activities than armed operations. It could be postulated that it was the outbreak of Siyahkal that initially tilted Jazani's interest in favour of armed struggle as expressed in *What a Revolutionary Should Know*.

Alluding to his involvement in student politics of the 1960s under the umbrella of the National Front, Jazani posited that most founders of military organizations had been reared and directly involved in political and guild activities before turning to armed struggle. He argued that gaining experience in political and guild activities enabled oppositional organizations to establish contact with the

people and obtain first-hand experience of the conditions of struggle. Jazani highlighted the importance of those political forces which had political-guild experiences in their revolutionary résumé, calling them “deeply-rooted (riseh-dar) currents”.¹²

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Jazani’s reference to the importance of legal methods of struggle served two purposes. First, it provided a context for his urgent call to introduce political and guild activities, which he called the “old methods of struggle”.¹³

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Jazani argued that people were familiar with this known method, and it needed to be resumed, to attract them to the mass struggle. Second, Jazani made a virtue out of involvement in student and political activities, as a prerequisite for qualifying as a “deeply rooted” or “proper” revolutionary. Jazani knew that the Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Meftahi Group, in contrast to most members of his original group, were averse to student politics. Jazani also knew that Hamid Ashraf kept away from student politics.

Jazani identified a crisis in the way the guerrillas had been conducting their affairs. He referred to their track record as one of “failures and disappointments” (nakamiha). He announced that the time for relying solely on military operations had come to an end. It was time for the “armed movement” (jonbesh-e mosallahaneh) to consider “new forms of struggle”. Those resisting this “new form of struggle” were accused of dogmatism.¹⁴

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Looking for new forms of struggle

The gist of Jazani’s “new approach” to struggle was simple, yet his arguments and reasonings were complicated, as he did not wish to come across as an adversary of armed struggle, the distinguishing brand of the Fada’is. If the

Fada'is had gained popularity and fame among the people, it was solely based on their identity as guerrillas using the gun against the regime. Jazani praised the armed struggle movement and the "Siyahkal epic" (rastakhiz-e Siyahkal) as a shining force which had broken the silence and hopelessness of the people at the height of the regime's repression. He glorified the military operations conducted by the guerrillas after the Siyahkal epic. In his opinion, the attack on the Qolhak Police Station and "General Farsiyou's execution" had transformed the struggle into a "social movement", had given birth to "the revolutionary armed movement", and had "ended twenty years of retreat beaten by Iran's liberation movement".¹⁵

▪

Staunchly defending the armed struggle movement, Jazani categorically condemned the Tudeh Party's ideological attack on the "revolutionary movement". He criticized the Tudeh Party's deep-rooted opportunistic line of following a "middle of the road path". For Jazani, such a path consisted of accepting armed struggle as "a method of struggle" among others, while allowing the supporters of the "political line" (mashy-e siyasi) to continue with their efforts, wasting the energy of the progressive forces.¹⁶

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Surprisingly, in the final analysis, the theoretical content and implications of Jazani's "new forms of struggle" came very close to the Tudeh Party's "middle of the road path".¹⁷

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There was, however, one marked difference between the two analyses. The Tudeh Party avoided mentioning armed struggle as a method of struggle, while Jazani systematically referred to the "pivotal role" of armed struggle.¹⁸

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In the context of Jazani's "new forms of struggle", armed struggle was in effect given an accessory role. For mass struggle to be born, Jazani believed that armed struggle had to step down from the centre stage of the movement, leaving its place to other, non-military forms of struggle.

The recurrent references to the "pivotal role" of armed struggle in Jazani's writing served as a reminder to his readers that he had not ruptured with the *raison d'être* and identity of the Fada'is. Yet, he relegated armed struggle to an

important relic or symbol of the past, which had galvanized and mobilized the youth, but needed to be transcended. By the time Jazani finished with the role of armed struggle in the armed movement, the original notion of armed struggle as elaborated by Zia-Zarifi, Pouyan, and Ahmadzadeh had become completely devoid of its original meaning and function. From their point of view, armed struggle in Iran required all energies to be focused on violent, clandestine military organizations and activities.

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Underlining the role of legal methods of struggle

Jazani initially identified those groups involved in military operations as the vanguard and the effective leaders of the movement. He further acknowledged that political and economic activities also played a role in mobilizing the masses and helping the movement to evolve. The political and guild/economic groups could organize collective action, foment, and take charge of discontent within various vocations and professions. They could agitate in universities, schools, factories, banks, government offices, ministries, bureaucracies, the bazaar, and among traditional guilds, such as tailors and shoemakers. Jazani argued that the time had now come for the revolutionary movement to benefit from non-military forms of struggle, such as behind the front-line logistical organizations and publication units aimed at supporting and mobilizing the members of various professional groups.¹⁹

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Up to this point, Jazani's ideas were not different from his previous views in *What a Revolutionary Should Know*.

Whereas in *What a Revolutionary Should Know* he had put significant weight on armed struggle, now he was readjusting the scales. Jazani gradually highlighted the importance and role of non-clandestine political and economic groups. According to Jazani, such groups constituted "the most important source for the

expansion of the armed struggle movement”. In due course, they would provide the necessary manpower for the military organization. Jazani called for the creation of such political and economic groups and outlined their responsibilities and limitations. They had to avoid being dragged into clandestine activities, confronting the police, and engaging in military and semi-military operations. Their activities were to be limited to overt and peaceful methods of struggle and brushing up on Marxist–Leninist theory through “the study of classical texts”. These political and guild groups were to become sympathizers and supporters of the armed struggle while using all possible legal opportunities available to them. Jazani recommended that they work with government-controlled unions and engage in discussions with government authorities.²⁰

▪

Jazani’s emphasis on peaceful, legal, and overt political activities was based on his belief that armed struggle had failed to convince the masses to take up arms. He advised the military cells not to look upon the political and guild groups “as rivals” but as the “most important base for the expansion of the armed movement”. He called on military cells to persist in paving the road for “mass struggles” through “the creation of political and guild cells and groups”.²¹

▪

Jazani argued that abstention from the use of legal methods had “created an impregnable wall between the masses and the vanguard”, hampering the “direct mobilization of the masses”.²²

▪

The pure theory of armed struggle, relying on armed struggle alone, was not acceptable to Jazani. He affirmed that armed cells could not create political and guild units adjacent to themselves. So Jazani ruled that “military organizations were obliged (movazafand) to spare and set aside cadres for organizing political and guild groups.”²³

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A matter of trade-off

In practical terms, Jazani was instructing Hamid Ashraf, the commander of the Fada'i guerrillas, to pull out an unspecified number of his guerrillas from active combat and to relocate them towards overt and legal activities. Irrespective of the number of cadres taken out of combat and placed into legal operations, compliance with Jazani's directive would have dispersed the guerrillas, weakened their military organization and their firepower, reduced their operations, and exposed the guerrillas to arrest during their open political activities.

Pursuing his idea of creating logistical organizations behind the front line, Jazani argued that such bodies needed to be planted abroad. He recommended that, to the extent possible, the leadership and management of these overseas units be undertaken by a few of the "highest ranking" cadres of the guerrilla movement.²⁴

▪

The overseas units, he argued, would be responsible for establishing propaganda and instructional centres. Just as Manouchehr Kalantari had been dispatched to London in April 1967, Jazani wished to see Hamid Ashraf leave Iran.²⁵

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After a series of serious setbacks which brought the Fada'i Organization to the brink of annihilation, Ashraf summed up his appraisal of the Iranian revolutionary experience. In Three-Year Assessment (Jam'bandi-e seh saleh), written in the winter of 1973–1974, Ashraf pointed out that "the task of training and preparing comrades is a lengthy process requiring patience." He warned that it was unreasonable to expect the young guerrilla recruits to rapidly develop "a mature and calculated way of facing problems".²⁶

▪

Ashraf called for patience in the face of shortcomings, reminding his comrades-in-arms that "the revolutionary growth" of cadres needed time. Ashraf remained optimistic that after three years, "a brighter perspective was opening before us concerning the growth of the organization and the expansion of guerrilla activities."²⁷

▪

Ashraf seemed to be responding to Jazani.

Jazani was conflicted when it came to the practical trade-offs facing the guerrillas in the field. On the one hand, he acknowledged how difficult it was to produce “a guerrilla who was the equivalent of a capable commando”, and that the “few experienced comrades who acted as commanders” were faced with “limited resources”. He also conceded that each member of the guerrilla organization played a decisive role in the struggle.²⁸

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Yet, on the other hand, Jazani recommended the transfer of fighters to political/guild activities at home and publication/propaganda units overseas.

Jazani held an equally paradoxical view of the importance of military cells and their armed operations. He argued that armed struggle was imperative as it constituted the only dissuasive force capable of intimidating the regime, awakening the people, and preventing them from falling into despair and hopelessness. Jazani even overstated the importance of armed struggle when he argued that it forced the regime to cede political liberties and freedoms, within which the political and economic organization could flourish.²⁹

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Yet, he proposed weakening the military units by syphoning resources from them to buttress the political and economic cells. The depletion and undermining of the military cells left no guarantee that they would be able to survive, let alone carry out the activities that Jazani expected of them.

Notes

[1](#)

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Parviz Navidi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 170.

[2](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 1.

[3](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 2.

[4](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 17.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 17.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 40.

[7](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 15, 22, 34, 35, 38–40, 42, 43.

[8](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 5.

[9](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 6–7.

[10](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 3, 4, 16, 18–20, 22, 40.

[11](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 5.

[12](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 19.

[13](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 39.

[14](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 38.

[15](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 46–48.

[16](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 52–53.

[17](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 18–24, 70–80.

[18](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 64.

[19](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 18, 23.

[20](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 21, 23–24.

[21](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 21.

[22](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 36.

[23](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh`i mishavad, p. 22.

[24](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh`i mishavad, p. 22.

[25](#)

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Same` and Madani in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 141, 391.

[26](#)

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Ashraf, Jam`bandi-e seh saleh, p. 91.

[27](#)

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Ashraf, Jam`bandi-e seh saleh, p. 3.

[28](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh`i mishavad, pp. 66–67.

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Jazani, *Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad*, pp. 22, 66, 67, 71.

Softly Disarming Armed Struggle to Regain the Trust of the Masses

Around 1975, some four years after the Siyahkal strike, Jazani wrote a sequel to his earlier treatise *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*. This approximately 36,000-word treatise was said to have been written and rewritten three times between 1972 and early 1975 at Qasr prison.¹

Jazani's new work was entitled, *The Most Pressing Problems of Our Revolutionary Movement at This Moment* (Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni). Yet it came to be commonly known as *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship, the People's Principal Enemy and the Gendarme of Imperialism* (Nabard ba diktatori-e Shah be masabeh-e 'omdehtarin doshman-e khalq va zhandarm-e amperialism).²

In this work, Jazani expanded on his previous ideas, and provided a theoretical context for his propositions.

Jazani's point of entry in his new treatise was that the opposition movement was at an "anti-dictatorial" stage. He argued that in Iran three elements opposed the masses, "imperialism, the [dictatorial] regime and the capitalists". However, now, Jazani opined, the main enemy of the people was the Shah's dictatorship. It was the Shah's dictatorship which had pushed the progressive forces towards armed struggle. Jazani had come to believe that preparing for the revolution and

mobilizing the masses for the “mass democratic revolution” (enqelab-e demokratic tudeh’i) required pursuing an “anti-dictatorial democratic struggle” (mobarezh zedd-e diktatori-e democratic).³

▪

Jazani was not using the Soviet minted term “national democratic revolution” but the content of his “anti-dictatorial democratic struggle” was similar. Just as in a “national democratic revolution”, the leadership of Jazani’s anti-dictatorial democratic struggle was with non-proletarian democratic forces, namely the revolutionary intellectual petty bourgeoisie. Again, as in the case of a “national democratic revolution”, the struggle itself was primarily anti-dictatorial rather than anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, and therefore aimed at uniting all classes among the oppressed. Jazani identified the stage of the struggle in Iran as an anti-Shah (national) democratic one rather than a bourgeois democratic movement. He considered the stage of struggle in Iran as similar to the anti-Batista struggle in Cuba. For Jazani, the main social contradiction was between the people and the dictatorship.⁴

▪

He argued that attaining the objectives of this new stage required new forms of struggle. The anti-dictatorial struggle had to find its form of armed struggle. Jazani restated his observation that the masses had failed to respond to the armed struggle movement and relaunched his idea of political and trade union activities as the way to bridge the gap between the people and the revolutionary vanguard. Jazani’s subtle revision of armed struggle, which he called a “new cognition or re-understanding (baz-shenasi) of the armed movement”, was completed in five distinct steps.⁵

▪

▪

Step One: The correct stage in the movement

To begin with, Jazani reaffirmed his belief in armed struggle, assuring his

readers that his discourse was well within a Marxist revolutionary discourse. He called attention to his new formulation: “The consolidation of armed struggle is not contingent upon its form.” “It is rather, its content”, Jazani posited, that “should reflect the most important needs” of the movement. It was this content which “guaranteed the consolidation of this struggle”.⁶

▪

This formulation was opening the door to arguing that, at a given historical moment, “consolidation of armed struggle” could be best served by non-armed struggle methods. Jazani was calling on “all progressive working-class groups (jaryanha)” to incorporate “economic struggle and consciousness raising of the working class” into the liberation movement.⁷

▪

Jazani was talking to the guerrillas combatting the Shah’s dictatorship and telling them that the liberation movement was not necessarily the same as engaging in military operations. For Jazani, the democratic element of the “anti-dictatorial democratic struggle” was calling forth non-violent means of struggle.

Jazani now defined armed struggle, in the Iranian context, as a method employing violence (qahr) against the enemies of the people. He explained that armed struggle, however, was a variable concept, as it applied to “the smallest individual initiative” as well as to “the broadest mass battle”. Returning to his new formulation, Jazani argued that armed struggle possessed different contents during each phase of the movement, and that armed struggle changed form with the alteration of its content.⁸

▪

Armed struggle was presented as an evolving concept, and was not to remain entirely reliant on military operations during all phases of the movement.

Jazani distinguished between the form of armed struggle carried out by “progressive working-class groups” during the preliminary phase of the movement, and the final phase when “the masses would be mobilized and the revolution could start”.⁹

▪

At the time of his writing, some four years after the launching of armed struggle, Jazani opined that armed struggle in Iran was still in a “preliminary and

preparatory” stage. In other words, armed struggle was only preparing the grounds for “revolutionary violence”.¹⁰

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Jazani was reasoning that during this stage, the vanguard was to rely on armed operations as the “fundament and pivot” of struggle, but the armed movement should not be limited to armed struggle as its only method.

According to Jazani, in this “preliminary and preparatory” phase of the movement, the prime role of armed operations would be to raise the consciousness of the people and carry out propaganda. However, once the revolution had begun, the form of armed struggle would evolve. At that point, armed operations would “destroy the actually existing system and transfer political power”. Jazani was emphasizing the relative insignificance of armed operation in the “preliminary and preparatory” phase of the movement as compared to the revolutionary phase.¹¹

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Step Two: Walking on two legs

Jazani deduced specific methods of struggle appropriate to the phase of combatting the Shah’s dictatorship. He reasoned that despite the regime’s fascistic repression of the vanguard, the masses would not feel truly oppressed unless they were subjected to it directly. If they were brought to protest and became involved in an oppositional movement, then they would “feel the regime’s bayonets on their chest”. Jazani was proposing that the movement (jonbesh) employ all “its available capacities” to “draw the people to voice their economic demands”.¹²

-

This was in tune with the “anti-dictatorial democratic struggle”.

Jazani's emphasis on non-military, economic, and political methods of struggle was based on his assessment that, due to their lack of consciousness, "the masses were incapable of engaging in armed struggle at the command of the vanguard." Jazani posed the question, "what should the masses do" while the vanguard was fighting their war? He offered an answer in the form of a question, which implied that armed struggle was part of the problem. Jazani wrote, "Should they [the masses] watch the combat between the vanguard and the regime and become distanced from their responsibility?" According to Jazani, the people were not ready for military operations, and that was why he was proposing strikes, demonstrations, and trade union activities as an alternative mode of struggle.¹³

▪

To transform economic grievances into militant demands, protests, and eventual confrontation with the regime, Jazani called on the movement to pay closer attention to people's livelihood, their financial needs, and problems. Jazani was defining "armed struggle" in this phase of the armed liberation movement as one where "emphasis was placed on [articulating and venting] the people's economic demands". The guerrillas (cherik) were prompted "to enter the daily life of the people". The new guerrillas, according to Jazani, were expected to combine "their struggle against injustice with a struggle for improving the welfare and wellbeing of the people's daily lives".¹⁴

▪

He claimed that this new strategy would "mobilize the revolutionary forces". For Jazani, engagement in economic and guild activities was neither secondary (far'i) nor supportive (komaki) "but an inevitable necessity".¹⁵

▪

To operationalize the emphasis on fanning economic demands, Jazani was introducing a new form of armed struggle consistent with his "anti-dictatorial democratic struggle". The stratagem of the "revolutionary movement" during this phase would be "a combined one" (talfiqi), incorporating military, political, and economic forms of struggle. This, he claimed, was "the dialectical combination" of various methods of struggle, and different from a simple mixing of various forms.¹⁶

▪

In *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, written a few years before, Jazani had

categorically stated that in order to confront Iran's "military dictatorship", there was no other alternative to using "the violent road" and "resorting to force and arms". Jazani had firmly stated that a "true combatant" was one who was "dedicated to overthrowing the despotic ruling system".¹⁷

▪

Yet he had also stated that preparation for the first stage of the revolution would be completed when revolutionary cells and political and guild/economic cells had been established.¹⁸

▪

In *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, Jazani had also acknowledged that peaceful possibilities should not be overlooked, although he had subjected the employment of peaceful means to great caution and reserve. Jazani had written, "in case" the military cells had "the possibility" to create political and economic groups, they should do so by using "the reserve personnel around themselves".¹⁹

▪

Less than three years later, Jazani's basic ideas had not changed, but the stress, emphasis, and weight that he placed on military, as compared to political, methods of struggle had significantly altered. Jazani was clearly shifting away from the urgency, pre-eminence, and primacy of armed struggle, distancing himself from revolutionary Marxists who were solely committed to armed struggle.

Jazani pushed for his "combined method", as opposed to a pure armed struggle method, by emphasizing that "according to a classic principle", Marxist-Leninists used all tactics and forms of struggle.²⁰

▪

Jazani evoked Lenin's classical formula of the importance of "revolutionary conditions".²¹

▪

He pointed out that for Lenin, it was not sufficient for the oppressed classes to be unable to tolerate their condition, but also that the ruling classes be incapable of maintaining their rule. Relying on Lenin, Jazani argued that, in addition to the objective conditions of the revolution, the subjective conditions also needed to be present for a socialist revolution to succeed. In other words, Lenin's

subjective conditions for revolution would be fulfilled once the masses were ready to fight, and a revolutionary party was in place.

Armed with Lenin's formulation, Jazani identified the "misguided and deviationist" Marxist–Leninists. They were those who believed that objective conditions for the revolution existed when they began armed struggle (1971). The misguided also believed that the masses were subjectively prepared to respond to the call of their vanguard and would join the movement. The deviationists also believed that peaceful forms of struggle could at best perform a supportive role in the movement.²²

▪

Jazani argued that denying the importance of the objective conditions, minimizing the role of the masses, and underestimating revolutionary theory were not based on Marxism–Leninism, but reflected adventurism and left-wing disorder.²³

▪

He posited that "we" have fallen to "vanguardism" and have condemned "ourselves" to separation from the masses.²⁴

▪

It seemed as though Jazani envisaged himself as the guardian of the Fada'is.

While reminding his readers of his Marxist–Leninist commitment to the indisputable vanguard role of the proletariat in the revolution, Jazani invoked another potent Leninist principle, that "without the working people all bombs are powerless, patently powerless".²⁵

▪

The quote was employed by Jazani to argue that the masses, especially the working class, needed to be mobilized. However, the only way to attract them to the movement was to employ the low-risk peaceful means of struggle needed in an "anti-dictatorial democratic struggle".

Jazani explained the virtue of his combined method by arguing that it activated the masses and connected them to the vanguard.²⁶

▪

He recommended, therefore, the creation of a “political branch” (jenah-e siyasi). The guerrilla organization would be responsible for creating cells that would, in turn, organize the people’s political and guild movements. The “political branch” would consequently become the “second leg” of the “armed movement”.²⁷

▪

Jazani was incorporating peaceful methods of struggle as an integral part of the “revolutionary movement” or “armed movement”. As such, his new “armed movement” was walking on two legs. One leg relied on lawful, peaceful, non-clandestine activities. The other, however, relied on illegal, violent, clandestine, and armed operations. The two legs were designed to thrust forward the armed movement. It was never acknowledged that, as one leg was respectful of the regime’s laws, and the other was intent on overthrowing it, the two legs risked working at cross-purposes. Moreover, the illegal leg under SAVAK’s close scrutiny could easily jeopardize the existence of the legal one.

▪

Step Three: Iran’s paradoxical political condition, democratic and despotic

For political and guild activities to work as bait, attracting the working people to the movement, and moving towards preparing the objective conditions of revolution, an essential precondition was necessary. Iran had to be a democracy or a semi-democracy, and the Shah’s regime needed to extend democratic rights and liberties to citizens, allowing them to engage in political and guild activities. Was Jazani suddenly assuming that Iran was a democracy or a semi-democracy? According to his new formulations, the regime would allow political organizations to express economic and work dissatisfactions through strikes and to channel syndicalist and trade unionist discontent into political activism. The regime was expected to allow political activists to familiarize the people with revolutionary armed movements and expose its illegal and unjust activities to the public.²⁸

▪

For Zia-Zarifi, Ahmadzadeh, Pouyan, and Jazani, the *raison d'être* of the revolutionary vanguard and its armed struggle had been the very absence of democratic rights and liberties in Iran. All theoreticians of armed struggle had been unanimous that the undemocratic political system rendered legal and peaceful political methods obsolete. In his earlier work, Jazani had been adamant on the issue that “without any doubt, political confrontation with a system, reliant on military dictatorship is only possible through violent means”.²⁹

▪

Jazani had characterized the regime as “monarcho-fascist”, a “monarchical military dictatorship”, imposing the “most advanced and systematic methods of repression”.³⁰

▪

He had been of the opinion that the ruling system “had trampled upon all their [the people’s] political and social rights”.³¹

▪

Even in his latest work, Jazani was referring to those conditions in Iran “which rendered impossible the livelihood and growth of revolutionary groups based on purely political methods of struggle”. In view of such a reality, Jazani made a case for “the historical mission” of “the responsible vanguard groups” to “apply revolutionary violence” (*e’ mal-e qahr-e enqelabi*). For Jazani, “the fascistic oppression and repression” did not allow for the “growth and development of clandestine political currents” in Iran.³²

▪

Notwithstanding “the fascistic oppression and repression” in Iran, Jazani was proposing that the armed movement “employ all its capabilities” simultaneously to draw people into peaceful political and economic activities.³³

▪

Jazani was arguing that, “under the present conditions (*sharayet*), we cannot deny the possibility of political or collective action.” He was taking a further step and adding that, “even under more difficult circumstances, these conditions [conducive to political or collective action] will not cease to exist.”³⁴

▪

Echoing the position of the Tudeh Party’s publication, *Mardom*, in 1964, Jazani

was introducing the idea that Iran may go through phases of “semi-democracy” and “half-baked democracy” in the future.³⁵

▪

Jazani seemed to have been searching for a theoretical rationale for his “combined” (talfiqi) methods of struggle.

Jazani’s “combined” and sometimes “composite” (tarkibi) formulation, however, created major complications in terms of categorizing the Iranian political system. The logical outcome of Jazani’s formulation was that Iran was both undemocratic and democratic, allowing for both peaceful and violent methods of struggle, in which armed struggle and peaceful methods of struggle needed to be employed simultaneously. While Jazani was recommending political forms of struggle as a means of battling the Shah’s dictatorship, Hamid Ashraf announced that “armed struggle was the anti-thesis to the Shah’s dictatorial and fascistic repression”.³⁶

▪

Reporting on Iran’s political situation in 1974 and 1975, Anthony Parsons, the British Ambassador in Iran, weighed in unintentionally on the debate around the availability of democratic conditions for political and guild activities. He wrote, “SAVAK is, or is believed to be, everywhere and it has its informers in government offices, factories, schools, universities, guilds and so on.” Parsons concluded that “without these constraints, the floodgates would open – shades of the Mosaddeq era – and all the good he [the Shah] has done would be washed away in chaos and anarchy.”³⁷

▪

▪

Step Four: The guerrillas’ conflicting remits, or unity of opposites

In *Combating the Shah’s Dictatorship*, Jazani continued to envisage a place for armed operations, and wrote of the vanguard carrying out its historical

responsibility through political-military methods. He concluded that “the application of revolutionary violence”, “which constituted the primary task of the political-military organization”, would “constitute the pivot and prop of political activities”.³⁸

▪

In order to align the responsibilities of the guerrillas with his “combined method” of struggle, Jazani introduced “armed propaganda” as the most appropriate form of struggle during the anti-dictatorial phase.

Jazani envisaged “military strikes against the regime which would positively impact the people’s morale in favour of the struggle”. He suggested that military operations, in this phase, should be with the intention of weakening the “absolute power of the regime in the eyes of the masses and putting an end to the people’s sense of absolute weakness”. Jazani called on the guerrillas to conduct military strikes to “wake up the masses and draw them into contestation and protest”.³⁹

▪

Through military operations, the guerrillas were expected to show the enemy that they were intent on “continuing with the struggle, even if it meant arrest or martyrdom of every member of the military organization”.⁴⁰

▪

Conducting substantial military operations, however, required the consolidation and expansion of guerrilla units. The armed guerrillas would need to strengthen their strike capabilities as a fighting body.

Jazani also expected the guerrillas to “establish direct contact with the people” through “political propaganda”, and the establishment of “political-guild cells”. The guerrillas were instructed to become involved with and “serve the political and economic struggles of the people”.⁴¹

▪

In practical terms this meant that the guerrillas were to engage in trade union activities, student protests, and political agitation, as well as issuing and distributing declarations and samizdat literature. Jazani believed that guerrilla fighters in Iran could lead double lives of violent-peaceful, secret-public, soldier-civilian, and illegal-legal.

Having instructed the guerrillas to engage in open political and economic agitation, Jazani now required them to act also as a shield for economic and political struggles. He argued that “if the regime is not opposed by armed struggle, it will easily oppose political and economic struggles with violence.”⁴²

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Jazani was repeating an earlier idea that armed struggle was supposed to stimulate and protect the political and economic method of struggle.⁴³

•

In Jazani’s new configuration, guerrillas were conceived of as both fighters and political workers.

In fact, Jazani seemed to expect the guerrillas to enter armed action once the regime clamped down on the unarmed and peaceful activists. But, if political and economic struggle were to expose the people to violence and possible armed clashes, necessitating the armed protection of the vanguard, why then would people with an aversion to violence according to Jazani, enter political and economic struggle? Concerned with the safety of its own guerrilla fighters and following its own objectives, under the regime’s constant threat, how and why would the vanguard risk involvement in protecting political and guild activities, in the early stages of the movement?

Jazani had one final expectation of the guerrillas. They were charged with expanding and giving rigour to various popular movements. The armed vanguard was required to unite and lead the scattered protests around the country. By channelling all voices of discontent, the vanguard was expected to lead a united mass movement.⁴⁴

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In the interim, while waiting for the masses to enter the movement, Jazani was assigning any and all sorts of tasks to the armed vanguard, from social work, education, political, and economic activities to fighting against the regime.

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Step Five: Armed propaganda and the combined method of struggle

An armed struggle movement which focused on military operations could not possibly multitask as required by Jazani's "combined method" of struggle. For the first time, in *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*, Jazani invoked the notion of armed propaganda, instead of armed struggle. Jazani's understanding of the concept of armed propaganda was different from that of Ho Chi Minh, the father of this form of struggle, and that of Võ Nguyên Giáp, who elaborated on it in *People's War, People's Army*. It was also different from how Régis Debray, Carlos Marighella, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, and Hamid Ashraf understood the term.

Ho Chi Minh had ordered the creation of "The Vietnam Liberation Armed Propaganda Unit" on 22 December 1944. This unit of armed propaganda had come into existence once guerrilla activities "were intensified and widely extended" and the Viet Minh Committees had been known to the villagers "as an underground organization of revolutionary power". This was an organizational form in preparation for the final armed uprising by the Liberation Army.⁴⁵

•

The task of the armed propaganda teams had been to go from one village to another to communicate with and persuade villagers. They were responsible for raising the consciousness of villagers with the aim of "establishing operational revolutionary organizations in the villages". Ho Chi Minh had identified the armed propaganda teams as "permanent military units". With regard to tactics, they were to "fully employ the guerrilla tactics of secrecy, speed, activeness, mobility, stealth and flexible manoeuvre".⁴⁶

•

Régis Debray explained the "armed propaganda line" as a means of convincing the masses to enlist in the rebellion. Under this approach it was "necessary to address" the masses through political work or "mass work". "The first nucleus of fighters" needed to be divided into "small propaganda patrols" and sent to the villages and mountain areas. Their task, according to Debray, was to "explain the social goals of the Revolution and denounce the enemies of the peasantry". According to the "armed propaganda line", it was only "at the end of this stage, having achieved the active support by the masses" that the guerrillas could "pass

over to direct action against the enemy”.⁴⁷

•

Debray argued that even though armed propaganda had been possible in Vietnam, it was difficult to consider it as a form of armed struggle elsewhere. Debray did not reject armed propaganda. However, contrary to the “armed propaganda line”, he argued that armed propaganda could not be “a stage distinct from and prior to military operations”. The armed propaganda, he believed, had to follow military action. For Debray, “the most important form of propaganda” was “successful military action”. Debray minimized the effect of political and propaganda work to spur revolutionary consciousness. He warned against confusing “a military foco – motor force of a total war – with a foco of political agitation”.⁴⁸

•

For Marighella, armed propaganda meant “the sum total of the actions achieved by the urban guerrillas, especially those carried out by force of arms”. As such, armed propaganda was the demonstration side emanating from armed action. For Marighella, the military operations created their own ripple effects through the modern mass media. Yet, he argued that the guerrillas need to publish and distribute their own literature.⁴⁹

•

In his treatise in the summer of 1970, Ahmadzadeh paid considerable attention to the concept of armed propaganda as presented by Debray. Ahmadzadeh did not refute armed propaganda but asserted that the issue at hand was to find the best form of action and organization which would effectively address the masses and attract them to the movement. He argued that, depending on different conditions and situations, purely political, politico-military, or purely military forms could be adopted.⁵⁰

•

However, he concluded, neither peaceful nor purely political activities could attract the masses to the movement. He proposed that it was only the “little armed engine” that could propel the “large engine of the masses”.⁵¹

•

Hamid Ashraf’s use of the term armed propaganda in April/May 1971 was also different from Jazani’s use in late fall of 1974 and early winter of 1975. In his

One-Year Assessment of Urban and Rural Guerrilla Struggle, Hamid Ashraf qualified the objective of the Siyahkal assault as “armed propaganda”.⁵²

•

The Siyahkal military operation had conveyed a clear political message to the masses as well as the regime. As such, it had constituted “armed propaganda”. For Ashraf, the propaganda aspect of the term referred to the consciousness raising process among the masses, which dovetailed with military operations.

In his last known writing, in May/June 1976, Ashraf referred to military operations, such as attacks on military bases and headquarters as well as banks, as examples of armed propaganda during the first phase of struggle. Ashraf must have considered the Fada'i operations from 21 March 1974 to 20 March 1975, which did include assassinations, as examples of armed propaganda. For Ashraf, armed propaganda implied carrying out operations that were tangible and palpable for the masses, responding to their needs, and creating an opening to draw the masses into the armed movement.⁵³

•

Ashraf's use and understanding of the term armed propaganda was more in line with Debray, the Tupamaros, and Marighella.

In his new formulation, Jazani had identified armed propaganda as the most suitable form of organization to combat the regime. He argued that it was wrong to think that the military operations of the guerrillas could overthrow the regime by attacking its leadership. In his opinion, it was misleading to think that military operations could destroy the military might and the economic structure of the regime. He was therefore concluding that armed struggle in the anti-dictatorial phase of the movement could only be armed propaganda.⁵⁴

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Jazani refused to attach any military significance, other than a symbolic demonstration effect, to armed struggle in the context of armed propaganda. In Jazani's opinion, placing emphasis on armed struggle was only meaningful in the final revolutionary phase of the movement.

In line with his emphasis on armed propaganda, which he understood as more propaganda and less armed activities, Jazani revised and restrained his previous excitement over possible military activities. Those activities recommended in the

past, such as disarming policemen, kidnapping diplomats, assassination, or the mass killing of the enemy, were becoming reprobate.⁵⁵

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Jazani reiterated that the guerrillas were in a pre-people's war phase, and therefore could not kill a policeman to disarm him. He informed the guerrillas that they were merely supposed to engage in defensive operations. They could open fire and kill only if and when the police or SAVAK attacked them or prevented them from carrying out an operation. Jazani minimized the importance of the attacks on Generals Farsiyou and Taheri, arguing that the assassination of high-ranking military and SAVAK officials was futile.

Earlier, however, Jazani had hailed Farsiyou's assassination as an act which had transformed the struggle into a "social movement", had given birth to "the revolutionary armed movement", and had "ended twenty years of retreat beaten by Iran's liberation movement". According to Jazani's previous assessment, the assassination of Farsiyou in April 1971 had marked the inception of the "armed revolutionary movement".⁵⁶

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Around 1974–1975, Jazani turned back the clock and concluded that since the movement was in its preparatory stage of armed revolution, it required defensive armed propaganda rather than offensive military operations.

For Jazani, armed propaganda, in the preparatory stage of armed revolution, was far from being the "motor force of a total war", and was much closer to, although not quite, a "foco of political agitation". Its purpose was to impact the masses psychologically. The armed aspect of this form of struggle, according to Jazani, was to enable the masses to envision an alternative. From a practical point of view, Jazani's "combined method" in Iran of 1973–1974 was an unstable recipe with irreconcilable ingredients.

Yet, in Jazani's treatise, one could easily find passages in which he expected the guerrillas, even in the preparatory stage of the revolution, to be ready to pounce on the regime. He condemned belligerent military actions, while in the same breath, he expected such military actions at the "right time". When the masses were "squirming under the savage blows of the regime", Jazani exhorted the guerrillas to spring up again and "exercise their revolutionary violence".⁵⁷

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By emphasizing the pivotal role of armed struggle in his “combined method” of struggle, and upholding armed propaganda as the appropriate form of struggle, Jazani was ensuring against the charge of being an opportunist who was following the old Tudeh Party line.⁵⁸

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Two interpretations of armed struggle

Jazani’s main objective in *Combatting the Shah’s Dictatorship* was encapsulated in less than two pages. He posited that “Marxists who believed in armed struggle as the revolutionary stratagem in a general mass movement, were confronted with two different interpretations of armed struggle.”⁵⁹

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Jazani proposed that one interpretation was correct and should be adopted by the Fada’is, while the other was erroneous and needed to be rejected as deviationist.

Jazani maintained that, according to one interpretation (his own), the vanguard would play an active role in bringing about the objective conditions for the revolution. Starting armed activities did not mean starting the revolution, but would constitute an initial phase in the liberation movement of the masses. The application of revolutionary violence in this phase was of a propaganda nature. During this phase, which could last for years, the people’s vanguard evolved and mobilized the masses primarily through legal political and economic engagements: recruiting, preparing, and leading them towards the all-out people’s war. Working-class networks were expected to play a determinant role in this phase. Jazani suggested that a working-class vanguard, having taken the lead from the revolutionary intellectual vanguard, would transform itself into a party which would then assume the leadership of a people’s democratic revolution.⁶⁰

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According to Jazani, the proponents of the “other interpretation” held a series of flawed ideas. Even though it was clear that Jazani was referring to Ahmadzadeh as the ideologue of the “other interpretation”, he desisted from directly naming him. Jazani intimated that for Ahmadzadeh and his followers the objective revolutionary conditions did already exist. Therefore, they thought that the masses were ready to heed the vanguard’s call. This interpretation, Jazani suggested, was under the illusion that the masses would join the movement as soon as the guerrillas began their military operations. Jazani imputed certain beliefs to the proponents of the “other interpretation”. He argued that they had been under the illusion that, after their first armed attack, recruitment of fighters in urban and rural areas would be swift, and the ranks of the guerrillas would swell, leading to the expansion and multiplication of their operations. To Ahmadzadeh, his unnamed nemesis, Jazani ascribed the belief that the powder keg had been ready to blow up, and all it needed was a spark to begin the people’s democratic revolution.⁶¹

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The thrust of Jazani’s ideological charge against the “other”, “unhealthy”, “deviationist”, “adventurist”, and “leftist” interpretation revolved around two fundamental postulates. He maintained that he had not believed in the availability of objective revolutionary conditions and alleged that Ahmadzadeh had. Jazani also claimed that Ahmadzadeh had believed that once the armed struggle had begun, the masses would immediately join the movement, while he, Jazani, was not of this opinion.⁶²

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The issue of objective conditions of revolution

Actually, neither Jazani nor Ahmadzadeh had believed that the objective conditions were ripe for the revolution. In their writings, they had both pointed out the absence of the objective conditions of the revolution, in the classical Marxist–Leninist sense of the concept. Both had believed that the labouring

classes would, at first, be sitting on the sidelines, watching the vanguard battle against the regime. Jazani was correct, however, that Ahmadzadeh had referred to the existence of an innovative concept of “the objective conditions” of the revolution, entirely different from its traditional classical definition.⁶³

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Ahmadzadeh engaged in two distinct sets and levels of argumentations. One was based on the classical Marxist–Leninist notion of objective conditions of revolution. Through that lens, he compared the conditions in Russia, on the eve of the revolution, to the socio-economic and political conditions in Iran, and concluded that in Russia the spontaneous movement “demonstrated the availability of the objective conditions of revolution”. Ahmadzadeh carefully listed the classical indicators proving the existence of objective and subjective revolutionary conditions in Russia.⁶⁴

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In relation to Iran, he openly acknowledged the absence of “any significant signs of a spontaneous movement”, “any class organization or workers’ organization”, and acknowledged the “unpreparedness of the working class masses to put up a fight”.⁶⁵

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In a transparent intellectual process, Ahmadzadeh demonstrated that arguing within the classical Marxist–Leninist framework resulted in delaying revolutionary action, until the maturing of the objective conditions. To bring about political change, through armed struggle, he was not willing to allow Marxist–Leninist technicalities to get in his way. He had shared his concern openly, and had written that given the conditions in Iran, “evoking the excuse of the unavailability of objective conditions of revolution was not only a manifestation of opportunism, acquiescence, and reformism, but a lack of political courage, and the justification of inaction.”⁶⁶

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Ahmadzadeh, therefore, abandoned the classical Marxist–Leninist framework, and resorted to revolutionary Marxism–Leninism to justify his call to arms. At this level of argumentation, Ahmadzadeh began with the necessity of armed struggle and worked his way back, to justify it. Turning classical Marxism–Leninism on its head, he deduced the existence of the objective conditions of revolution in Iran from their very absence. Engaging in a spectacular theoretical

somersault, Ahmadzadeh asked, “Would it be correct to conclude that in the absence of spontaneous mass movements, the objective revolutionary conditions are absent and that the revolutionary epoch (dowran enqelab) is not at hand?” His answer was “I do not think so.”⁶⁷

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Ahmadzadeh posited that the revolutionary epoch (dowran enqelab) was at hand, yet the classical objective and subjective conditions for revolution were absent. For Ahmadzadeh, irrespective of the objective conditions, the revolution was at hand.

To partially fix the inconsistency between his new position and classical Marxist–Leninist arguments, Ahmadzadeh proceeded to conceptualize a different kind of “objective conditions of revolution” in Iran. This was a “theoretical” patch-up job. The evidence and proofs he presented for his claim included the existence of palpable enthusiasm among the revolutionaries to find a way to make revolution, a concern for revolution among combative circles, and the police’s waves of repression, torture, and murder.⁶⁸

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Ahmadzadeh concluded that such evidence was “a subjective manifestation of the readiness of the objective conditions of the revolution” (en‘ekas-e zehni-e amadeh boodan-e sharayat-e ‘eyni-e enqelab). This previously unheard-of notion was very different from affirming the existence of standard objective conditions of the revolution.⁶⁹

▪

Ahmadzadeh was blunt in his proposition that the uprising needed to begin in Iran without the support of the masses. Ahmadzadeh’s heretical statement of “why should insurrection be the job of the masses” expounded the essence of his revolutionary Marxism. This statement candidly, and almost indelicately, expressed his belief in the unavailability of classical Marxist–Leninist objective revolutionary conditions.⁷⁰

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For Ahmadzadeh, the classical objective and subjective conditions of the revolution were to be prepared in the process of the revolution. Therefore, what was of prime importance was starting the uprising through armed struggle, not the availability of revolutionary conditions.⁷¹

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How long would it take the masses to join the movement?

It would be incorrect to suggest that Ahmadzadeh believed that the masses were ready to join the vanguard as soon as armed operations were launched. Ahmadzadeh repeatedly spoke about the masses “gradually” joining the vanguard after “a lengthy armed struggle”.⁷²

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Four months after the armed struggle had begun, Ahmadzadeh, who was in the thick of military operations, wrote, “In no way (be hich vajh) do we believe in the unconditional support of the masses. In no way do we expect the masses to revolt at this time.” Ahmadzadeh was very clear in breaking with the old school of Marxism–Leninism. He wrote, “At this time, the masses will be represented by their children, the vanguard, the revolutionary and genuinely revolutionary groups.”⁷³

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In Ahmadzadeh’s formulation, the vanguard carried out its own lengthy independent armed struggle, without any connection with the masses. Ahmadzadeh did not promise a quick alignment of the masses with the vanguard. He clearly stipulated that the vanguard would fight until the time when the masses were ready to enter the movement. He could not, and did not, stipulate a specific time lapse between the beginning of armed operation and the masses entering the fray. He did not believe in the availability of the objective revolutionary conditions in the classical sense of the term, so how could he predict when those conditions would come about through the action of the revolutionaries? For Ahmadzadeh, the exact time needed for the masses to connect with the vanguard could not be specified in advance, but it was clear that it would not be short. He had consistently hammered at the fact that the struggle would be “hard and long”.⁷⁴

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The two postulates on which Jazani was constructing his attack on the “other interpretation” were unfounded.

The tardiness of the masses, or what Jazani called their disconnection from the vanguard, had been predicted by Ahmadzadeh, and could not come as a surprise to his proponents. For Ahmadzadeh and those who had read his work, the absence of the people’s physical support in the initial stages of the armed struggle could not be a sign of failure. Jazani’s claim that the armed struggle movement was in crisis because it had failed to become a mass struggle after three years, and that it had wasted “worthy forces”, was a broadside attack.⁷⁵

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Especially since in *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, Jazani had posited that “we are not worried about the lengthening of the struggle.”⁷⁶

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Even in his latest work, Jazani had reminded the guerrillas that they should be ready for a “long and difficult struggle”, and pursue the struggle “as long as it was necessary”.⁷⁷

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Saving the armed movement from the unhealthy leftist tendency

Jazani was challenging Ahmadzadeh’s ideas under the pretext of a crucial ideological struggle against “unhealthy tendencies”, which were afflicted with “fundamental deviations”.⁷⁸

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Jazani was calling on “all combatants, especially true Marxist–Leninists” to fight against such deviant tendencies.⁷⁹

▪

The real danger threatening the movement, he claimed, was not rightist opportunism, but unhealthy petty-bourgeois leftism. The “young and inexperienced” Iranian movement, he claimed, had been exposed to an “infantile disorder”, well entrenched in the Fada’i guerrilla movement. This unhealthy tendency had, according to Jazani, damaged “the growth of the movement, and if it was not seriously fought against, would endanger the whole movement”.⁸⁰

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Jazani was unleashing a witch-hunt against unnamed bogeymen who were presented as enemies even worse than the opportunists of the Tudeh Party.

Jazani hinted at the identity of the unhealthy petty-bourgeois adventurist deviants by acknowledging that they were not newcomers who had appeared in the past two years, but had existed since the “embryonic stage of the movement’s growth”.⁸¹

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Demonstrating streaks of rivalry, Jazani minimized the impact of the works by Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh on young politicized students before Siyahkal. He suggested that it was only after the launching of armed struggle that “the texts in defence of armed struggle had come to life and had been eagerly devoured by those forces which had been attracted to the movement”. Battling unnamed ghosts, swaying moral and theoretical authority over the Fada’is, Jazani suggested that, in the absence of armed struggle, “these texts would not have been capable of generating excitement and enthusiasm” among active members of society.⁸²

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With Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh out of the picture, and Ashraf too busy conducting the guerrilla war against the regime, Jazani was jockeying from his prison cell for the ideological leadership of the People’s Fada’i Organization. He called on the healthy tendency within the Fada’i guerrillas to move away from armed operations. This was not an easy sell. The ideologues of the Tudeh Party had for long freed themselves of promoting any form of armed struggle. They too had hammered at the significance of improving the welfare of the toiling masses through “professional associations, trade unions, syndicates, newspapers and open, over-board organizations”.⁸³

▪

Jazani was navigating between the Tudeh Party's line, and yielding before the ideological hegemony of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh.

In the last two pages of *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*, Jazani engaged in an ingenious, and most revealing question and answer session with himself. Curiously, he first spoke on behalf of the proponents of Ahmadzadeh's "unhealthy tendency". Jazani asked, "Faced with the realities of these past three years, what will happen to those who thought the revolutionary conditions were available and the masses would swiftly support them?" This question, he maintained, was on the mind of all those who had a misplaced or erroneous expectation of armed struggle. Jazani responded to this question on behalf of the "healthy tendency". He posited that these leftist supporters of armed struggle would eventually lose hope, become introverted, denounce the revolution, and conclude that armed struggle was a mistake. In this imagined exchange, Jazani was coming very close to formally renouncing armed struggle without actually saying it. After a few twists and turns, Jazani described his vision of an armed organization stripped down to the bone, effectively standing down. Yet, looming in the background was an abstract reminder to the regime and to the people that if need be it could enter the stage and still rain fire. Jazani sought to demonstrate how in practice leftist tendencies, or the pursuit of pure armed struggle among the guerrillas, would inevitably turn into opportunism and renouncing armed struggle.⁸⁴

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Presenting himself as the reasonable defender of armed struggle, Jazani was repeating Ehsan Tabari's argument that left-wing communism would lead inevitably to right-wing opportunism. To cleanse the Fada'i movement of Ahmadzadeh's influence, and impose his own, Jazani was hoping to influence the Fada'is fighting away from the battlefield.

Notes

[1](#)

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Asghar Izadi's interview with Madani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 112. Mehdi Same' remembered copying this work on cigarette paper with a Bic ballpoint pen during fall of 1974 and early winter of 1975 at Qasr Prison. Same', personal interview, 15 September 2015.

[2](#)

▪

Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship, the People's Principal Enemy and the Gendarme of Imperialism will be referred to as Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship for short.

[3](#)

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 24–25.

[4](#)

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 25–27.

[5](#)

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 28.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 28.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 28.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 29.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 29.

[10](#)

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 34.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, pp. 29–32.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 31.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, pp. 34–35.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, pp. 65–67.

[15](#)

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, p. 31.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 31, 35.

[17](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 57, 65.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 69.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 68.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 33.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 9.

[22](#)

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 42.

[23](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 15, 41–44.

[24](#)

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 36.

[25](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, p. 34. The

quote is from V.I. Lenin, “Revolutionary Adventurism”, Lenin’s Collected Works, vol. 6, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966, pp. 186–207, <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-06.pdf>

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(retrieved 26 June 2020).

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa’el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 31.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa’el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 35.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh’i mishavad, pp. 71–77.

[29](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 65–66.

[30](#)

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad, pp. 33–34.

[31](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 65.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 32.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 31.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 35.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 20–21, 32–33, 36.

[36](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 4.

[37](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 2496, NBP 1/1, “Political Situation in Iran, 1975”, 14 August 1975.

[38](#)

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, p. 32.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 36, 37.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*,

pp. 72–73.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, p. 39.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, p. 32.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 54.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 35–36.

[45](#)

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Võ Nguyên Giáp, *People's War, People's Army*, pp. 24, 39, 52, 70, Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/giap/1961-pwpa.pdf>

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[46](#)

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(retrieved 14 July 2019).

[47](#)

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Debray, p. 46.

[48](#)

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Debray, pp. 47–53, 55–57.

[49](#)

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Marighela, For the Liberation of Brazil, p. 89.

[50](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 121–124, 130–131.

[51](#)

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 133, 136.

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Ashraf, Tahlil-e yek sal mobarezeh-ye cheriki dar shahr va kouh, pp. 7, 8, 10.

[53](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 12, 13.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, pp. 36–38.

[55](#)

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, pp. 70–71.

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Jazani, Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh' i mishavad, pp. 47–48.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 39.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 33.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 41.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 41. This paragraph is almost a direct translation of Jazani.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni,

pp. 41–42.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 98.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 65.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 58–59.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 62–63.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 64.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 64.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 65–66.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 65.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 54.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 147–148.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 13, 54–55.

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Ahmadzadeh, p. 12.

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Ahmadzadeh, pp. 120–121, 147.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 33–34, 67–68, 76, 78.

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Ancheh yek enqelabi bayad bedanad, p. 49.

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 67, 72.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, pp. 76–77.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 76.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 88.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 88.

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Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni, p. 65.

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Javan, p. 19.

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▪

Jazani, Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzehe-ye konouni,
p. 98.

Jazani's Ideological Offensive in Prison

In his writings, Jazani was projecting his own apprehensions and misgivings about the role of armed struggle onto the guerrillas who were battling the regime outside prisons. At the time, there was nothing to corroborate Jazani's doubts. Neither Ashraf's Three-Year Assessment of armed struggle nor the pages of Nabard-e Khalq, the Fada'i guerrillas' official organ, conveyed any sense of gloom or demoralization. If anything, the fact that the Fada'is had been able to carry out their operations and publish was a sign of their consolidation rather than any crisis. If Fada'i members and sympathizers in prison were concerned about the efficiency and purpose of military activities or were worried about the delay of mass support for the revolutionaries, signs of such misgivings were difficult to discern among the guerrillas outside.

In prison, Jazani's "combined method" of struggle would not have necessarily caused much alarm at first. On the contrary, in the absence of new theoretical works since the writings of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh, fresh analysis must have been welcomed by left political prisoners. For those who believed in continuing the military operations, and who were impressed by Jazani's theoretical stature, his references to the pivotal role of armed struggle and armed propaganda could have veiled the greater importance he was placing on the political and economic leg of the movement. Jazani's repetition of the importance of the pivotal role of armed struggle reduced considerably nervousness and opposition to his new ideas.

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Spreading the good word

After Siyahkal, and probably around March 1971, Bijan Jazani was transferred from Qom prison to Evin prison in Tehran. He was brought to Evin, interrogated and tortured in connection with the Siyahkal operation.¹

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Sometime around August/September 1971, he was transferred to ‘Eshratabad prison.²

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Towards the end of his stay at ‘Eshratabad prison, Jazani confided in another political prisoner that the authorities had enquired about his reaction to a hypothetical political thaw or liberalization in the context of which he could form a legal opposition party. His reaction had been very positive, and he had reportedly welcomed the possibility.³

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It was in the spring, perhaps around May 1972, that he was transferred to Qezelqal‘eh prison.⁴

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Around six months later, he was transferred again, this time to Qasr prison. Just before this transfer, he spent three days (12 to 15 November 1972) at the Shahr bani Provisional Prison.⁵

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Pressed by the proponents of armed struggle to share his views, Jazani met with them. During his short stay, Jazani discussed his ideas with the political inmates and after dinner answered their questions. At their few nocturnal gatherings, Jazani spoke about the symptoms of leftism (chapravi) in the armed struggle movement and explained the “context and conditions” responsible for its emergence. He further emphasized the use of political forms of struggle as the “second leg” of the revolutionary movement.⁶

▪

After his short sojourn, on 15 November 1972, Jazani was transferred to wing number three (band-e seh) of Qasr prison.

Four months later, on 17 March 1973, Parviz Navidi and Jamshid Taheripour were transferred within Qasr prison from wing number four to wing number three. Taheripour had been in contact with Ghafour Hasanpour before Siyahkal and Navidi was put in contact with Mehdi Fazilat-kalam of the Fada'is after Siyahkal. Both were arrested sometime between June and September 1972 before engaging in any operations. According to Navidi, life in wing number three at Qasr, in contrast to wing number four, was calm and smooth, except for the cold and unfriendly relations between the Mojahedin and Jazani. Navidi believed that Jazani's arrival at Qasr in November 1972 was instrumental in the reconstruction of the People's Fada'i organization in prison. According to Navidi, Jazani had brought the diverse Marxist–Leninist proponents of armed struggle under one roof and had given them a sense of unity. Jazani is said to have striven to create a single organizational unit composed of all Marxist–Leninists committed to armed struggle in all Iranian prisons.⁷

▪

Navidi's impression of wing number three conveys the feeling of a university. He recalled that, under the auspices of Jazani, the prisoners were involved in study groups, class-like gatherings, and reflective seminars. Under Jazani's patronage, inmates were studying historical materialism, dialectical materialism, methods of combatting the political police, current history of the armed struggle movement, and economics. They were given small classes during which they "primarily studied Jazani's handwritten manuscripts and treatise". The prison atmosphere, according to Navidi, was characterized by healthy discussions during which Jazani systematically succeeded in convincing his contesting interlocutors. In Navidi's eyes, Jazani was a persuasive consensus-builder whose "political knowledge, revolutionary sincerity, and power of reasoning" were so overwhelming that "eventually all those comrades who disagreed with him came to be persuaded by him and joined him."⁸

▪

Another account of Qasr prison by Naqi Hamidiyan, a member of the Sari branch of the Fada'is formed around 'Abbas Meftahi, tells a different story. Hamidiyan's impression of Qasr prison was not first-hand but based on what he had heard while he was at Mashhad's Vakilabad prison. After Jazani's arrival at

Qasr prison, a line of demarcation was drawn between the more established prisoners, reared in the Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh revolutionary discourse, and Jazani's circle. Jazani's claim to be the "founder" of the armed struggle movement did not sit well with the old prisoners. Those familiar with Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh's works and practice, but unfamiliar with Jazani's writings and revolutionary track, looked upon Jazani as someone who had been in prison, and therefore had played no role in the ongoing armed struggle.⁹

▪

According to a revolutionary practitioner of the Fada'is who was transferred to Qasr prison between November 1973 and January 1974, those in prison at the time "were not involved in the leadership of the organization before their arrests".¹⁰

▪

To Ahmadzadeh's followers, Jazani seemed like a political latecomer and even an upstart. Jazani's rethinking of armed struggle was viewed by the majority of the Fada'is in prison at the time as "a confrontation (moqabeleh-jou'i) with armed struggle from within".¹¹

▪

On 27 June 1971, 'Ali-Asghar Izadi blew up the Shah's statue at Gonbad. Izadi was a member of Asadollah Meftahi's Tabriz network. He had been recruited by Asadollah Meftahi and Javad Rahimzadeh-Oskou'i in 1968–1969 and had accepted the path of armed struggle in the summer of 1970. He was arrested on 18 July 1971 and put on trial with twenty-two other key members of the guerrillas, including some of the founding members of armed struggle such as Mas'oud and Majid Ahmadzadeh, 'Abbas and Asadollah Meftahi, Hamid Tavakoli, Gholamreza Galavi, Sa'id Ariyan, and Bahman Ajang. Izadi was first condemned to death but subsequently his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in March 1972.¹²

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Izadi, who had spent time in Borazjan prison, entered wing number four of Qasr prison around February or March 1973, where he stayed for over a year.¹³

▪

He recalled that at the time, he and his like-minded comrades, partisans of Ahmadzadeh's line of thought, had decided not to approach Jazani and his

entourage. Looking back on those days, Izadi thought that his aversion to meeting them was due to two reasons. First, he and his friends thought that Jazani believed “also” in political activities. In their mind, Jazani’s emphasis on political and guild activities as the “second leg” of the struggle weakened armed struggle and constituted a retreat from it. Second, Izadi and his friends thought that Jazani’s ideas were close to the Soviets. At Qasr prison, Izadi knew that Jazani was spearheading a tendency that was questioning Ahmadzadeh’s line of thought.¹⁴

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By February or March 1973, Izadi, who was at Qasr prison, had read neither Jazani’s *What a Revolutionary Should Know* nor *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*. While in prison, he was not provided with these two writings and therefore never read them. Izadi recalled that it was only after Jazani’s execution, and most probably after the death of Hamid Ashraf (29 June 1976), that he read *Combatting the Shah’s Dictatorship* while he was still in prison. During the prison debates between the proponents of Jazani and Ahmadzadeh, Izadi was orally exposed to the ideas expressed in *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*.¹⁵

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Open schism in prison

Jamshid Taheripour recalled Jazani’s criticism of Ahmadzadeh and Pouyan in wing number three of Qasr prison. Taheripour believed that the main thrust of Jazani’s argument was directed at pulling down or dethroning (be zir keshidan) “arms” (selah) or armed struggle from the lofty position it occupied in Ahmadzadeh’s outlook.¹⁶

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Jazani’s criticism of Ahmadzadeh’s ideas on armed struggle deepened the schisms within the Fada’is.¹⁷

▪
In the new conflicted political atmosphere, the imprisoned Fada'is gravitated towards new alignments.¹⁸

▪
Jazani's ideological struggle came to a heated head at the beginning of 1974.¹⁹

▪
It has been suggested that around February 1974 "the process of armed struggle had caused doubts and hesitations" among some prisoners. These misgivings are said to have paved the way for a "re-assessment of the objectives of armed struggle".²⁰

▪
At Qasr prison, sometime between October 1973 and January 1974, partisans of Ahmadzadeh's interpretation of a pure method of armed struggle formed a loose circle which included Asghar Izadi, Behrooz Soleymani, Siyavosh Shafe'i, 'Ali Sattari, Morteza Malek-Mohammadi, and Gholam-Hoseyn Ebrahimzadeh. During the same period, in Shiraz (Adelabad) prison, the proponents of a pure method of armed struggle were 'Abdolrahim Sabouri, Fariborz Sanjari, Mohammad-Taqi Afshani-Naqadeh, and Bahram Qobadi.

Ahmadzadeh's partisans who emphasized their continued belief in the fundamental role of military action were locked into a face-off with Jazani and his partisans. The atmosphere at Qasr was so tense that old comrades even became aggressive towards one another.²¹

▪
The heated debates between Jazani and his partisans and the staunch proponents of Ahmadzadeh created considerable tension, polarity, and animosity among Fada'i prisoners, especially at Qasr prison.²²

▪
Ironically, even though from late 1973 differences between the two schools were brewing at Qasr prison, Ahmadzadeh's partisans remained in the dark about Jazani's last two works, let alone *What a Revolutionary Should Know*. 'Ali Sattari recalled never having read any of Jazani's latest works in Qasr, or for that matter, later in Evin. He was not provided with such literature and became exposed to Jazani's prison writings only after he was freed from prison.²³

▪

According to Asghar Izadi, “Jazani’s writings were primarily (‘omdatan) placed at the disposal of the proponents of Jazani’s ideas.”²⁴

▪

The permeation of Jazani’s ideas in prison, strictly through his writings, seemed restricted to a close circle of his followers.

Mohammad Farsi was not only scribe but also librarian of Jazani’s secretly embedded works at Qasr prison. Farsi recalled that Jazani’s works were either not made available to some prisoners or were made available after lengthy delays. Farsi concurred that on certain occasions (mavaredi) it was true that “we did not make the writings available to others.” The prisoners from whom Jazani’s literature was withheld, according to Farsi, were those who were opposed to armed struggle. In his opinion, Jazani’s works were mostly lent to those who previously had nothing to do with armed struggle but were perceived as having an open mind on the matter and would perhaps join it. It could be surmised that Jazani’s literature was made available to potential recruits to Jazani’s line of thought. This supposition could explain why Jazani’s writings were not made available to proponents of Ahmadzadeh’s views who did believe in armed struggle.²⁵

▪

In sum, it seems as though access to Jazani’s writings in prison was provided only to his existing followers and to potential recruits to his line of thought.

According to a report attributed to Mohammad Farsi around winter 1974, Mohammad-Taqi Afshani-Naqadeh, an old member of the Tabriz branch of the Pouyan-Ahmadzadeh-Meftahi Group, wrote a pamphlet in prison. This pamphlet, which seems to have been called “Armed Struggle”, was a gist of Afshani-Naqadeh’s interpretation of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh’s views.²⁶

▪

This work must have been written by Afshani-Naqadeh at Shiraz prison. It is reported that once Jazani read this pamphlet, he decided to write a critique of it. His writing is said to have addressed twenty-five major problems with Afshani-Naqadeh’s interpretation of armed struggle.²⁷

▪

Both Afshani-Naqadeh's text and Jazani's criticism of it are lost, and no surviving copies are known to exist. Some of the prisoners who had been at Qasr prison in late 1973 and early 1974, and who were involved with these types of debates, claim that they never saw Afshani-Naqadeh's work nor Jazani's response to him.²⁸

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Afshani-Naqadeh's text and Jazani's response remain a mystery.

From 1974 onwards, tension and division intensified between the two different Marxist–Leninist interpretations of armed struggle. On the one side stood the numerically superior supporters of Ahmadzadeh, and on the other, some twelve Jazani enthusiasts.²⁹

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Taheripour claimed that Jazani's new formulations, supposedly his last two writings, were commissioned by those outside of prison. Taheripour did not divulge who but talked about a "message that had been received", instructing Jazani to "formulate (tadvin) the theory of the left movement".³⁰

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Taheripour's claim seemed to be an attempt at presenting Jazani's latest works as commissioned by Ashraf or the leadership team. Taheripour referred to the debates with Jazani in prison and provided a telling picture of Jazani's position among his prison sympathizers. Taheripour recalled, "Of course, it was not as if we would sit down and have a debate. Jazani occupied a position that made it impossible to keep up with his arguments and discussions."³¹

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Where did the original members of the Jazani Group stand?

While Jazani was reconsidering the fundamental role of armed struggle and was

criticizing “leftist tendencies”, ‘Abbas Sourki, one of the original members of his circle, was at Borazjan prison, where he had been consistently and vigorously promoting armed struggle. According to a prison report dated 6 November 1972, Sourki confided in friends that “it was because of the roar of their [the fighters’] machine guns that the new wave of struggle in Iran had climaxed and perplexed SAVAK.”³²

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The emphasis that Sourki was placing on the role of the machine gun was indicative that in November 1972, Sourki understood the role of military activities as fundamental and singular. Somewhere around December 1973 to February 1974, Sourki and ‘Aziz Sarmadi, two key members of Jazani’s circle, were transferred from Shiraz prison to Qasr. It was at Qasr prison that Sourki and Sarmadi read Jazani’s new works.

According to Shalgouni, after reading Jazani’s works Sourki continued to “believe in armed struggle in general”, and voiced no “disagreements” with the content of Jazani’s writings.³³

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Even though Sarmadi had problems with Jazani’s references to the national question in Iran, he had no disagreements with Jazani’s writings on the role of armed struggle.³⁴

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Roben Markarian made a critical observation. He recalled that at first, among those in prison who had read or heard of the central ideas in *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*, “no one saw much of a difference between Jazani’s and Ahmadzadeh’s outlook.”³⁵

•

According to Markarian, it was due to Sarmadi’s efforts that the difference of opinion between Jazani and Ahmadzadeh was brought to the surface on the issue of the availability or absence of objective revolutionary conditions. Sarmadi had spent a long time in isolated and far-flung prisons and was eager to find out how the movement was faring outside prison. Once at Qasr, he began talking to recently arrested comrades. In conversations with Siyavosh Shafe‘i, who was said to know Ahmadzadeh’s treatise by heart, Sarmadi and Shafe‘i came to a realization. They identified a difference between the views of Jazani and

Ahmadzadeh on the availability of revolutionary conditions.³⁶

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This became the real bone of contention between the partisans of Jazani and Ahmadzadeh.

In 1972, Zia-Zarifi was at Kerman prison, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar was at Arak prison, Aziz Sarmadi along with Sourki was at Borazjan prison, and Mohammad Choupanzadeh was at Ahvaz prison. Based on the scant reports available on the ideological position of each, an alteration in their view on the fundamental nature of armed struggle in the revolutionary movement cannot be identified.³⁷

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On 12 September 1971, according to a police report, Zia-Zarifi supported the assassination of General Farsiyou, and believed that other such activities would yield results.³⁸

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In 1974, while Zia-Zarifi was in wing number six of Qasr prison, he must have read Jazani's new works. According to Shalgouni, he made no references to any disagreements with Jazani and was in complete agreement with him.³⁹

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There is more than one testimony to the fact that Jazani's old comrades-in-arms never voiced any objections to his later theoretical works.⁴⁰

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Back in 1965/1966, Zia-Zarifi had believed that trade union activities or political organization among workers were impossible due to the "brutal and harsh police environment". In 1974, based on his past conviction, one might have expected Zia-Zarifi to question, if not challenge Jazani's theory of "combined methods".⁴¹

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Writing around 1965–1966, Zia-Zarifi had posited categorically that "important political experiences of the recent 14 years have correctly and clearly taught us that resisting a mad armed enemy through peaceful means will only result in failure and the aggravation of despair."⁴²

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To understand why Zia-Zarifi did not object to Jazani's new ideas, one could hypothesize that he may have changed his mind, and was now in harmony with Jazani's new formulations. Zia-Zarifi may have believed that Jazani's formulation of "walking on two legs" did not negate military operations. He may have thought that since the masses were not joining the movement, it was time to try the "second leg". Or he may have preferred to keep out of prison debates. Perhaps out of respect for Jazani, Zia-Zarifi had preferred to keep quiet. It is also possible that Zia-Zarifi may not have read Jazani's works thoroughly and critically. Finally, he may not have read the same texts that are available to us today.

Those revolutionaries who were reading Jazani's works in prison around 1973 and 1974 may not have been able to pause on the details and subtleties of his writings. It is also not clear which account of the recurrently corrected and edited versions of Jazani's works the political inmates were reading. Some Fada'i inmates were reading handwritten texts, particularly under the watchful eyes of the guards, while risking being discovered and punished. The rest were hearing summary accounts of what the readers had read and understood.

Jazani's texts were reproduced in very small handwriting on cigarette papers with an extra fine point pen.⁴³

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The soft packs of Zar cigarettes contained two layers of paper in which twenty cigarettes were placed. The outer layer had the brand name printed on the outside and was blank on the inside. This layer was too thick to be smuggled out of prison. The inside lining paper was blank on one side and had an aluminium film on the other. It was this paper which was used for writing. The artistry of separating the aluminium film from the paper had been learnt from the non-political inmates who used the aluminium film for smoking heroin in prison. The technique consisted of placing the sheet of paper in water until the aluminium film separated. Then the paper was dried and could be used for writing on both sides. These sheets were about fifteen centimetres in length and eight centimetres in width.⁴⁴

▪

Mohammad Farsi, Jazani's scribe, wrote on these cigarette papers. He often noticed that Jazani changed, crossed out, and rewrote parts of his text, which had first been written in a notebook. Farsi recalled that he engaged in his delicate and

difficult task of reading and copying Jazani's texts at night when prisoners were supposed to go to bed. Under a blanket, with the aid of a flashlight, while cellmates looked out for approaching guards, Farsi read Jazani's texts and speedily scribbled them on cigarette paper in minute handwriting.

According to Farsi, the texts he copied were often altered, with paragraphs removed and paragraphs added. Farsi copied one A4 page of normal handwritten text onto eight recto-verso sheets of cigarette paper, and paginated them before hiding them or smuggling them out of prison.⁴⁵

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Under such extraordinary conditions, the works of Jazani which are available to us today may be somewhat different from what had been originally written. Certain ideas, concepts, and emphases may have been inadvertently lost in transcription.

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The secretive delinking of armed struggle from the movement

Jazani's revision of his own ideas was communicated verbally to those around him and ran ahead of his new formulations reflected in his writings. According to Shalgouni, around February–March 1975, Jazani spoke about armed struggle as one among several tactics. For Jazani, armed struggle no longer constituted a pivotal tactic (taktik-e mehvari). At this time, Jazani did not believe that either mass struggle or political struggle were dependent on armed struggle (tabe' i az).⁴⁶

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In other words, by early 1975, Jazani had arrived at the logical finishing line of the path he had started in his two latest treatises. He had launched the idea of combined forms of struggle, diluting the role of armed struggle in favour of political and economic forms of open struggle. Jazani had finally come to delink

armed struggle from the revolutionary movement. He seemed to be further distancing himself from armed struggle and proposing the preparation of the revolution by peaceful and overt political and trade union activities.

Jazani's conversation with Jamshid Taheripour on 4 March 1975 confirmed a further step towards making armed struggle redundant. About a month before his execution by SAVAK, Jazani told five of his close comrades that armed struggle was only necessary if it could further the cause of political and trade union or guild activities. If in practice it failed to reach this end, Jazani ruled that armed struggle was not only unnecessary but harmful.⁴⁷

▪

Jazani had begun his criticism of the left-wing tendency by arguing that armed struggle had failed to attract the masses to the armed movement. In hindsight, Jazani's oral political will seemed to put an end to all speculation on where he stood on armed struggle. His ultimate verdict was that armed struggle could even be harmful for the movement.

This was a critical turning point, even in the diluted role that Jazani envisaged for armed struggle. Jazani's latest position could have been interpreted as a disavowal of armed struggle. His disclaimer about armed struggle did not seem to have been communicated to those outside the prison, and nor was it made public. Jazani's new insight and realization seem to have been a well-kept secret among his five close disciples. According to Taheripour, after the 4 March 1975 meeting, Jazani planted the seeds of doubt that he carried about the pivotal role of arms among his five close friends.⁴⁸

▪

We are not told if any of the five, only two of whom are said to be alive today, informed their fellow prisoners of Jazani's last will. To the guerrillas and their leadership outside of prison, Jazani's talk of a clear break with armed struggle would have come as a shock.

Jazani's new finding on the redundancy or danger of armed struggle, if it proved unable to help the political and trade union movement, was very different, even from his "combined method", which still symbolically envisaged armed struggle as the pivotal form of struggle. At the time of his execution, Jazani had left behind two incompatible vestiges: an oral, quasi-Tudeh Party discourse, and a written revolutionary-cum-reformist discourse.

It was not until October 1976 that a group of guerrillas, under the leadership of Touraj Heydari-Beygvand, split from the Fada'i guerrillas. Four months after the death of Hamid Ashraf, this group announced officially that it no longer believed in armed struggle. In the pamphlet which they distributed, they posited that armed struggle was a “futile and harmful” method.⁴⁹

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A year later, this group joined the Tudeh Party.

Finally, it was not until November 1977 that Payam-e Daneshjou, the student organ of the Fada'i Organization, criticized officially Ahmadzadeh's views of armed struggle, and engaged in a Jazaniist criticism of the movement since its inception. The announcement endorsed Jazani's concepts of “combined methods” and armed propaganda and promised that “armed tactics” would retain a pivotal role during the preparatory stage of the revolution. The article admitted that the Fada'is had been hasty, negligent of theoretical enrichment, and afflicted by “left-wingism”. Unaware of the last and critical shift in Jazani's position, the Fada'is promised that in the future, the organization would vigorously pursue the “second leg” of the struggle, namely political and economic struggles.⁵⁰

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The misunderstood or conflicted theoretician

It would be simplistic and reductionist to assume that Jazani was not emotionally attached to the notion of armed struggle. He had hailed Siyahkal as “epic”, a shining force which had broken the silence of the people at the height of the regime's repression. Jazani had been caught between two strong forces within himself. He considered himself the ideologue of armed struggle, and renouncing armed struggle would have been an act of self-negation. This affective and emotive tie prevented him from abandoning armed struggle altogether.

Jazani wanted to win a difficult battle. As a theoretician of armed struggle, and

in the name of the armed movement, he wished to dethrone armed struggle. In his written works, Jazani was unable to break off with either the affective or the theoretical preoccupations tearing him in opposite directions. He left his followers with an unstable, conflicted, and intermediate position which he had only orally rectified. Yet the magnitude of his correction was such that his close circle of friends did not dare divulge it at the time. Jazani left an enormous political and moral burden on his close circle of followers who heard his oral disapproval of armed struggle during his last days.

The progression of Jazani's ideas on the question of armed struggle had followed a bumpy path. He had started by identifying armed struggle as the principal activity of revolutionaries. At this stage, Jazani had believed that the establishment of political cells was necessary for the completion of the preparatory stage of the revolution. Nevertheless, he had cautiously questioned their necessity by suggesting they should be established "if" it was "possible" for the military cells to establish political cells. In the second stage of the evolution of his thoughts, he promoted walking on two legs and a "combined method" of struggle. He came to place considerable emphasis on political struggle and diluted the role of armed struggle, without eliminating it. The conclusion of his journey, according to oral reports, conducted him to walking on the single leg of political struggle. Did Jazani publicly disassociate himself from his work *What a Revolutionary Should Know* because of his enthusiasm in it for armed struggle as the principal activity of revolutionaries?

Mostafa Madani met Bijan Jazani at Qezelqal'eh prison in spring 1972 and was swiftly attracted to his theories and arguments. Some twenty-five years later, he offered valuable insight on the tenuous relationship between Jazani and the Fada'i movement. In Madani's view, until the eve of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Fada'i Organization operating outside the prison had not grasped Jazani's ideas in their totality (*dar koliyat ou ra nemifahmid*). Madani posited that Jazani's thoughts in prison had been far removed from the ideas which governed the guerrillas outside. Jazani's ideas, Madani believed, had been incomprehensible to them.⁵¹

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In an attempt to explain this schism, Madani hypothesized that perhaps it had been due to "the inconsistency (*tanaqoz*) in Bijan's [Jazani] insistence on the pivotal tactic" of armed struggle "which closed the door to this understanding".⁵²

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Madani argued that the success of the Chinese and Cuban experiences on the one hand, and the impetuous and chivalrous characteristics of the guerrillas, on the other hand, had compelled Jazani to be dragged into the paradigm of armed struggle.⁵³

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Madani's inference that Jazani had been pulled against his will into the armed struggle paradigm opens a Pandora's box on Jazani's motives for hanging on to the pivotal role of armed struggle in his writings. Had Siyahkal rushed Jazani into taking a position he was not quite comfortable with?

Notes

[1](#)

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Mihan Jazani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp. 71–72.

[2](#)

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The August/September 1971 date is speculative and extrapolated from information available. We know that he was at ‘Eshratābad prison on 10 January 1972, *Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, p. 201.

[3](#)

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‘Abdollah Gavami, personal correspondence, 4 August 2019.

[4](#)

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Madani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 388; Same ‘ in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 136; *Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran*, vol. 8, p. 203.

[5](#)

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Navidi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 168.

[6](#)

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Navidi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 168–170.

[7](#)

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Navidi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 173–176, 180.

[8](#)

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Navidi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 175–176, 179–180.

[9](#)

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Hamidiyan, pp. 140–141, 154.

[10](#)

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Asghar Izadi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 111.

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Hamidiyan, pp. 140–141.

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Ettelaʿat, 22 Esfand 1350; Falakhan, no. 38, Asghar Izadi.

13

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Asghar Izadi, personal correspondence, 9 May 2019.

14

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Izadi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 110–111; Asghar Izadi, personal correspondence, 9 May 2019.

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Asghar Izadi, personal correspondence, 9 May 2019, 14 May 2019.

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Jamshid Taheripour, <http://www.iran->

archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/taheripour_4.pdf

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(retrieved 17 June 2018).

[17](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in T. Atabaki, N. Mohajer, Rahi digar, vol. 2, Paris: Nashr-e noqteh, 1396, p. 401.

[18](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 399.

[19](#)

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Mohammad-Reza Shalgouni maintains that the differences clearly reared their head in 1974 and not before this date. Shalgouni, personal correspondence, 11 December 2018.

[20](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 400.

[21](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 401.

[22](#)

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Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 112, 139, 170–171;
Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, pp. 399–402, 412.

[23](#)

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‘Ali Sattari, personal correspondence, 16 December 2018.

[24](#)

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Asghar Izadi, personal correspondence, 14 May 2019.

[25](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 418.

[26](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, pp. 399, 415.

[27](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 399.

[28](#)

▪

Mohammad-Reza Shalgouni, personal correspondence, 11 December 2018; Same', personal correspondence, 12 December 2018; 'Ali Sattari, personal correspondence, 16 Decemeber 2018; Bahram Qobadi, personal correspondence, 4 August 2019. Qobadi, who was at Shiraz prison at the time, does not recall having heard of or seen such a pamphlet.

[29](#)

▪

Same' in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 139, 142.

[30](#)

▪

Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 393.

[31](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 393.

[32](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 381.

[33](#)

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Shalgouni, personal correspondence, 13 October 2018.

[34](#)

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Shalgouni, personal correspondence, 13 October 2018.

[35](#)

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Roben Markarian, personal correspondence, 18 December 2018.

[36](#)

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[37](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, pp. 298, 304, 417, 462, 469.

[38](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 298.

[39](#)

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Shalgouni, personal correspondence, 13 October 2018.

[40](#)

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Same⁶, personal correspondence, 12 December 2018.

[41](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 16.

[42](#)

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Tez-e gorouh-e Jazani, p. 28.

[43](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, p. 412.

[44](#)

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Same', personal correspondence, 26 April 2019.

[45](#)

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Rahim-Khani and Mohajer in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, pp. 412–414, 418;
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[46](#)

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Mohammad-Reza Shalgouni in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan
Jazani, p. 156.

[47](#)

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Jamshid Taheripour, [http://www.iran-
archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/taheripour_4.pdf](http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/taheripour_4.pdf)

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(retrieved 17 June 2018).

[48](#)

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Jamshid Taheripour in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 164.

[49](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 721, 749.

[50](#)

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Payam-e Daneshjou, shomareh 3, Azar 1356.

[51](#)

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Izadi in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 117. The person interviewing Izadi is Mostafa Madani; Madani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 388.

[52](#)

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Izadi and Madani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp. 117, 391.

[53](#)

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Madani in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 391.

The Fada'i Interface, Inside, Outside Prison

It would be safe to say that Jazani's first pamphlet, *What a Revolutionary Should Know*, had no echo, neither among Iran's university students, nor among the guerrillas who had already launched armed struggle against the regime. As much as Jazani became one of the icons of the Fada'i movement, especially after the 1979 revolution, his theoretical contributions and intellectual impact went almost unnoticed during the guerrilla movement in Iran between 1971 and 1975. Qorbanali (Majid) 'Abdolrahimpour recalled that Jazani's ideas "remained virtually unknown to a substantial number of the youth and intellectuals who joined the Peoples' Fada'i Guerrillas after the official formation of this body".¹

The rapidly turning wheels of urban guerrilla warfare after Siyahkal, and its growing popularity among university students, seemed to have overshadowed any theoretical rereading of armed struggle as both strategy and tactic.

Indirect interactions between Ashraf and Jazani in 1973

In March/April 1973, Mostafa Madani was released from Qasr prison. Before his freedom, Jazani had asked him to convey two urgent messages to Hamid Ashraf. Jazani wanted Ashraf to leave the country, but the latter paid no heed. Ashraf was also instructed to establish a political branch to carry out open guild and trade union activities. These units were to operate overtly and separate from the military branch. Jazani's insistence on Ashraf leaving the country has been confirmed by other sources. According to Madani, even though Ashraf spoke of establishing a political branch, it was never founded.²

•

Around July 1973, Ashraf wrote a piece expressing his views on armed struggle and the state of the guerrilla movement in Iran. The introduction to Ashraf Dehqani's work, *The Epic of Resistance (Hamaseh-e moqavemat)*, was written by Hamid Ashraf, some eight months after Jazani had presented his new ideas in prison and about five months after writing *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*.³

•

Most importantly, Ashraf wrote this piece some three months after Mostafa Madani's release from prison.

In his writing, Ashraf berated those who "lacked sternness, revolutionary audacity, and failed to trust the political essence (*nafs-e siyasi*) of the vanguard forces". He contrasted political methods of struggle with armed struggle, and mocked them as "political games and spectacles" that wasted people's energy. He cautioned the detractors of armed struggle and those who criticized the conduct of the guerrillas that "in the absence of a truly progressive and revolutionary organization which was forged in the process of revolutionary action", the people's struggle was doomed to defeat.

Ashraf addressed those who had not stood by the revolutionaries during the launching of the armed movement. He reminded them that the young generation had matured through "fire and blood". He lectured the talkative anonymous absentees that "those who were present in the movement had seen how iron was forged in the process of struggle." He praised the courageous youth who had responded to their historical calling, who had carried out their responsibility, and had put fear into the hearts of the enemy. To spread the struggle among the people, he called for more action and fewer words. Ashraf concluded that "what constituted the talisman or magic of this revolutionary generation, their power

and potential, was that they spoke little and acted more.”⁴

▪

By around July 1973, it was virtually impossible to discern any echo of Jazani’s ideas in Ashraf’s words.

It has been suggested that between September/November 1973 and April/May 1974, Jazani’s new theoretical works had gradually leaked out of prison. Parviz Navidi maintains that works, without specifying which works, were transferred out of prison by Behrooz Armaghani. These writings are said to have been reproduced in small numbers, and placed at the disposal of the military teams.⁵

▪

Heydar Tabrizi suggests that as of April/May 1974 (ava’el sal-e 1353) Jazani’s typewritten manuscript “Draft of the Sociology and Strategical Foundations of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement” had been put on the required reading list of “comrades in the organization”. Tabrizi had read the “Draft” in the summer of 1974. In the fall of 1974, Hamid Ashraf had given him a handwritten copy of *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* to study.⁶

▪

If Armaghani slipped some of Jazani’s works out of prison in April/May 1974, it would be reasonable to assume that the Fada’i leadership had access to Jazani’s *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* by the summer of 1974, if not earlier. Jazani’s criticisms of the Fada’is’ method of struggle and his clear warnings must have kindled some sort of reaction among the leadership. To evaluate the impact of Jazani’s works on the Fada’i leadership, one can turn to the Fada’is’ official writings during this period.

▪

On the correct method of struggle: The Fada’is and the Star Group

In spring 1974, the People's Fada'i Guerrillas were approached by an Iranian Revolutionary Marxist organization known as the Star Group (Gorouh-e setareh). The Star Group, which never publicized its name officially, was a circle within the Middle East branch of the National Front abroad (Jebheh-ye melli-ye kharej az keshvar, bakhsh-e khavar-e miyaneh). This was an independent Marxist circle, averse to both the Soviet-inspired Tudeh Party line and the positions adopted by emerging pro-Chinese Maoist groups.⁷

▪

The Star Group traced its genealogy to the National Front. Yet, it had come to the realization that the struggle against the Shah's regime and imperialism was no longer possible through "legal and peaceful means".⁸

▪

The Group had claimed its adherence to revolutionary violence (gahr-e enqelabi) and armed combat (nabard-e mosallahaneh). It was committed to supporting urban "revolutionary cells" in Iran, and to mobilizing a revolutionary People's Front. To this end, it had launched a series of ideological debates and engaged in the propagation of revolutionary ideas and news through its radio stations and its publication, Bakhtar-e Emrooz.⁹

▪

From 1972, the Group administered three important anti-regime and pro-guerrilla radio programmes, one after the other: The Revolutionaries (enqelabiyoun), The Patriots (mihanparastan), and Angel Messenger (soroush). These were popular radio programmes among the Iranian opposition. Both Mojahedin and Fada'i guerrillas had participated intermittently in the production of these programmes, which were transmitted from 1972 until 1975.¹⁰

▪

In fall 1970, the "National Front Organizations in the Middle East", stationed in Baghdad, had contacted Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh.¹¹

▪

A member of the Group, who was also a relative of Ahmadzadeh, travelled to Tehran. He met with Ahmadzadeh, and the two made plans for making future contacts.¹²

▪

After the Siyahkal assault, the two groups lost contact, and it was not until 1973 that they reconnected. Between 1971 and 1972, the Star Group had drafted its thoughts in a document later known as “On Revolution”. Having re-established contact in the fall of 1973, the final form of “On Revolution” was sent to the Fada’is for their appraisal and feedback.¹³

▪

The dispatch of this document was with an eye to merging with the Fada’is.¹⁴

▪

In the spring of 1974, the Fada’i guerrillas provided a detailed response to the Star Group. The approximately 13,200-word pamphlet, entitled Considerations/Reflections on “On Revolution” (Molahezati dar bareh-ye “dar bareh-ye enqelab”), was penned by Hamid Mo’meni, the thirty-two-year-old rising theoretician of the Fada’is.¹⁵

▪

This official document reflected the guerrillas’ position on armed struggle. Hamid Mo’meni’s writings on topics such as the appropriate form of struggle in Iran, and the relation between armed struggle and other forms of struggle, reflected the position of the Fada’i guerrillas in spring 1974.

Mo’meni began his treatise by taking issue with two key ideas put forward by the Star Group. First, they had stated that armed struggle was necessary, but specific only to a particular phase in the movement. Second, they believed that armed struggle did not imply “the negation of political work among the working class and the masses”.¹⁶

▪

Mo’meni conceded that, as Marxist–Leninists, Fada’is would always employ all possible forms of struggle. He reiterated that armed struggle was their “fundamental form of struggle (shekl-e asli-e mobarezeh), not the end-all of it”. In a crucial footnote, Mo’meni presented examples of other forms of struggle, including propaganda work, theoretical campaigns against the opportunists, publications, and direct contact with the people. Although Mo’meni spoke of “direct contact with people”, he did not mention trade union or political activities such as demonstrations and protests.¹⁷

▪

Mo'meni argued that, aside from armed struggle, other forms of struggle could be envisaged only if existing suffocating levels of state repression were to subside. But, he argued, such an eventuality was unlikely since the armed struggle of the guerrillas increased the level of repression. Should the regime decrease its level of repression, it would threaten its very existence. Mo'meni ascertained that "until the fall of the regime", armed struggle remained the "fundamental form of struggle". He warned that thinking otherwise would be "wishful thinking" with "dire consequences".¹⁸

•

Mo'meni criticized the claim that "armed struggle, in a preliminary phase, would lay the groundwork for another form of struggle, which would then become the fundamental form of struggle." He argued that, contrary to the position of the Star Group, armed struggle was not merely a means to creating a "conducive political environment" for "organizing the masses".¹⁹

•

Borrowing from Ahmadzadeh, he refuted the possibility of spontaneous movements maturing and transforming into a revolutionary movement. The events in Russia leading to the overthrow of the regime, he argued, could not be repeated in Iran. In a country like Iran, therefore, "Mass struggle needed to continue its growth through another form, that of guerrilla warfare." Mo'meni observed that "our main responsibility cannot be to organize the spontaneous movement of the masses."²⁰

•

A revolutionary organization in a country like Iran, he argued, can "only survive and grow if it takes on a military form".²¹

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Summer 1974: Armed struggle as strategy and tactic has the upper hand

Some three months after his response to the Star Group, Mo'meni wrote another piece in the summer of 1974, responding to criticism from Maoist groups abroad. In a pamphlet entitled *An Answer to the Opportunists' "On Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic"*, Mo'meni settled scores with anyone criticizing armed struggle and its failure to engage the masses. Mo'meni labelled as opportunists those who paid lip service to armed struggle, eulogizing it in their writings, but failing to put it into practice.²²

▪

Mo'meni's work could be regarded as a defence of Ahmadzadeh's ideas, and a rebuke of Jazani who was questioning the pure theory of armed struggle.

Mo'meni reminded his readers that, due to the "new age of repression", political action had to take "a military form to subsist and grow".²³

▪

He categorically rejected the argument that political conditions were suitable for working among the masses. The only possible contact with the people, he posited, was through distributing communiqués among them. Mo'meni therefore ruled out the possibility of political and trade union activities as a form of struggle.²⁴

▪

Based on two pages of examples, he demonstrated that the enemy managed and directed syndicates and workers' organizations, and repressed all political forms of protest.²⁵

▪

In jest, he invited those who longed to "go to the masses" and "carry out political activities" to put their theory into action. He was convinced that such an experience would put an end to their "empty slogan".²⁶

▪

In the midst of a theoretical debate with Maoist revolutionary organizations living abroad, Mo'meni made a curious, but most revealing point. He wrote, "It is interesting that the overwhelming majority of Iranian political prisoners believe in armed struggle and their vanguard organizations."²⁷

▪

This statement was far from an innocuous observation. It reflected the Fada'i fighters' concern with Jazani's new discourse from Qasr prison in which he was calling for a shift from pure armed struggle to a greater emphasis on political and economic methods of struggle. Mo'meni's theoretical debate with the Maoists abroad served the more essential purpose of addressing dissenting voices among the imprisoned Fada'is. As a practitioner-ideologue of the Fada'is, Mo'meni was reminding the Jazani tendency that Ahmadzadeh's theories were far from dated.

Speaking on behalf of the Fada'i guerrillas, Mo'meni's message to the "opportunists" was clear. The guerrillas believed that, under the political conditions of 1974, armed struggle was the fundamental and correct form of struggle, even though they did not deny the existence of other forms of struggle. Mo'meni concluded that the armed struggle experience during the past years had proven the veracity of the Fada'is' general line, rooted in Ahmadzadeh's book, *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic*.²⁸

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Reading about the correct method of struggle in People's Combat

In February 1974, the Fada'i guerrillas brought their ideas to the attention of the politicized community in an official organizational publication.²⁹

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People's Combat (Nabard-e Khalq) was a typed 20 to 180-page underground publication which appeared irregularly between February 1974 and June 1976. The seven issues of People's Combat covered ideological debates, reported on the military operations carried out by the guerrillas, and gave news of the broad anti-regime struggles. On the front page of the first issue, the guerrillas called themselves "Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq" or People's Fada'i Guerrillas. Their logo depicted a fist holding a machine gun and protruding out of the map of Iran at the centre of a globe, with a single star above the globe. People's Combat reported also on the Mojahedin's military operations.

In a supplemental issue, dated February–March 1975, People’s Combat published four official communiqués by the People’s Fada’i Guerrilla Organization. Each communiqué was issued after one of the four operations conducted between 8 and 11 February 1975. In these announcements, there was a manifest and recurrent reference to the importance and uprightness of armed struggle. Each of the statements ended with some sort of exaltation of armed struggle as “the unique path to the liberation of the masses”.³⁰

▪

The communiqués in February 1975 evinced the continued authority of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh among Fada’is and demonstrated the guerrillas’ negative attitude towards political works. The statements reiterated that armed struggle was “the only path left” to Iran’s toiling people. They repeated that “the regime’s tactics could be smashed only by reciprocating coercion with coercion, violence with violence.” People’s Combat observed that “peaceful means of struggle were giving way to violent means of struggle.” The Fada’is, however, did acknowledge that demonstrations and strikes were “useful in their own right” and that “within their capacity”, they would support “any anti-regime struggle”. Yet, they reminded their readers that “the Shah will repress these struggles with utmost brutality, and consequently these efforts will be to no avail.”

Their conclusion that “the end result can only be obtained through armed struggle” remained unchanged. The Fada’is wrote, “We believe that the victorious Iranian masses will complete the path of overcoming the enemy, which is armed to the teeth, only by taking up arms and engaging in an armed revolution.” The Fada’is promised that they “will not stand down until the full liberation” of their country was completed.³¹

▪

The military activities of the Fada’is, during the Iranian year 1353 and after the transfer of Jazani’s writings out of prison, did not abate. On the contrary, from 21 March 1974 to 20 March 1975, there was a perceptible upsurge in the guerrillas’ military operations.³²

▪

▪

Familiarity with and reaction to Jazani's works outside prisons

During 1974–1975, the Fada'is were scrambling to organize, train, and lodge their swelling forces into safe houses. Concurrently, they were trying to fend off attacks, as well as plan new blows against the regime. In the heat of such commotion, an ideological struggle was simmering in their rearguard. Divisions created by Jazani's writings inside the prisons must have found their way out. Outside prison, the rift between the proponents of Jazani and Ahmadzadeh never came to a head until Ashraf's death. Faced with the pressure of battling the regime, and under the leadership of Ashraf, the revolutionary practitioners maintained their unity and esprit de corps.

Since September 1970, it had been the works of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh which had attracted the youth to the Fada'i movement. It would be safe to say that until 1975–1976, members with no previous prison records were being inducted into the Fada'i movement primarily by reading Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh. The logic behind the attraction of these two works was simple. For those who were fed up with talking, demonstrating, and student politicking, and were tempted by armed struggle, Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh provided ideal emotional and rational justifications. According to 'Abdolrahimpour, from the spring of 1975, the Fada'is decided to review their policy of favouring the recruitment of "action-oriented" members, as the members in the leadership were predominantly inclined towards (military) operations.³³

▪

Around 1974, there was a rush to join the Fada'is among young militant students with no previous political jail records. There were also political prisoners, who had received light sentences of two to three years, who joined the movement and went underground when released from prison. Naqi Hamidiyan recalled that in the fall of 1974, at least eleven of those released from Mashhad prison joined guerrilla revolutionary cells. Later, they lost their lives battling the regime.³⁴

▪

At Mashhad prison, for example, Yousef Qane'-Khoshkebijari, an ex-student at Tehran's Polytechnic University, believed that the conditions in Iran necessitated armed struggle. Having been imprisoned twice in 1970 and 1972, he was released in June 1975. Qane'-Khoshkebijari joined the Fada'is upon his release,

and was killed on 29 June 1976, along with Hamid Ashraf.³⁵

▪

Other notable Fada'is who were released from prison and joined the Fada'is between June and December 1974 were Behrooz Armaghani, Ahmad Gholamiyan-Langaroudi, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki, Hasan Farjoudi, Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour, and Mostafa Hasanpour. After his release from prison, Armaghani joined the Fada'is and later became a member of the leadership team. He was arrested because of his membership in a group with Tudeh Party tendencies. While in prison he became close to Jazani and adopted his sociopolitical ideas.³⁶

▪

Militants who went underground in 1974–1975 could have read the works of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh, as well as the last two works of Jazani. Practically, however, it was not until the spring of 1975 that Jazani's works were read by Fada'i guerrillas outside prison and by university students. There is an exception to this generalization. In prison, Jazani had written a work called “Draft of the Sociology and Strategical Foundations of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement” (Tarh-e jame'h shenasi va mabani-e estrateji-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e Iran). The exact date when this work was written remains unclear, but it is said to have been written sometime between January and May 1973.³⁷

▪

Contrary to Jazani's two critical works, *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* and *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*, his “Draft” was almost like an academic textbook.

This was a fairly thorough study of contemporary Iran from a Marxist–Leninist and dependency theory perspective. The complete work was composed of two parts. Part one was a political-economy analysis, explaining the dependent capitalist structure of the Iranian economy and the rise of the comprador bourgeoisie. Part two was a comprehensive historical survey of political movements from 1940 to the “Siyahkal epic”.

Around October 1974, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki taught part two of Jazani's “Draft” at a Fada'i safe house on Coca-Cola Street in Tehran. Sadiqi-Pashaki, who later played a major role in two military operations and was killed in May 1976, was said to have been very well read in Jazani's work.³⁸

▪

In May 1975, Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, a member of the Fada'i leadership team, led an educational team in Karaj, close to Tehran. During the recruitment and training sessions of fighters, she too assigned reading Jazani's "Draft", along with the standard works of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh.³⁹

▪

The distribution of Jazani's "Draft" among members implied that, from mid-1974, the Fada'i guerrillas were using Jazani's "academic" writing as a useful textbook on Iranian political economy and history.

Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour had been arrested twice for his political activities. Having spent some twenty-nine months in prison, he was released in spring of 1974. At the behest of Behrooz Armaghani, he joined the Fada'is in September 1974 and went underground in February 1975. It was in the spring of 1975, and for the first time, that 'Abdolrahimpour came across Jazani's works, *What a Revolutionary Should Know and How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*. At the time, 'Abdolrahimpour was in a guerrilla safe house in Rasht.⁴⁰

▪

In 1974, while in prison, he had heard of Jazani's ideas and did not find them basically (asasan) different from Pouyan's. Even after reading Jazani's works, 'Abdolrahimpour did not find major discrepancies between his works and those of Pouyan.⁴¹

▪

'Abdolrahimpour maintained that Jazani's works, which had been written in prison, "were not distributed at a societal level" until March 1975.⁴²

▪

On 1 May 1975, SAVAK reported on the distribution of Bijan Jazani's pamphlet, *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* at Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering. The handwritten manifesto had the signature and emblem of the Fada'i Organization, implying the organization had decided to duplicate and distribute it.⁴³

▪

Sheyda Nabavi joined the guerrillas and went underground around July 1975. She had read the works of Ahmadzadeh and Pouyan around the end of 1972 and

the beginning of 1973, but she had not read any of Jazani's writings by the time she went underground. She did not recall talk of Jazani's works at her safe house during her first year as a guerrilla. She entered her first safe house in July 1975. It was not until around July and August 1976 that Nabavi first came across Jazani's treatise, *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*.⁴⁴

▪

After Hamid Ashraf's death on 29 June 1976, those who became Fada'i team leaders had scant knowledge of Jazani's ideas (*hanouz andak bood*).⁴⁵

▪

Some of them, like Hasan Farjoudi and Ahmad Gholamiyan-Langaroudi, were exposed to Jazani's *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship* after 29 June 1976. Having read the work, they both believed, for different reasons, that it should not be published at the societal level.⁴⁶

▪

In spite of their objections, after wider discussions among members, the Fada'is decided to publish and distribute this work.

'Abdolrahimpour observed that, during this period, many of the fighting guerrillas could not distinguish between the positions held by Ahmadzadeh and Jazani. Such members continued to defend the organization's original position, namely "placing emphasis unilaterally on military operations and refuting political works". 'Abdolrahimpour, a member of the leadership team after 29 June 1976, identified an interesting situation among the Fada'is. While Jazani's ideas were being widely discussed, "the main tendency among comrades continued to be in favour of pure military operations (*amaliyat-e nezami-e serf*)."⁴⁷

▪

Even after the guerrillas had officially adopted Jazani's position, they found themselves in a conflicted situation. According to 'Abdolrahimpour, they began "relocating the majority of their forces to political activities, even though they believed in the pivotal role of armed struggle".⁴⁸

▪

'Abbas Hashemi joined the guerrillas in the summer of 1976 after having read Pouyan, Ahmadzadeh, and Jazani. He recalled having read Pouyan and

Ahmadzadeh in 1971, right before Siyahkal. For Hashemi, Pouyan's work was mind-boggling (shegoftangiz). He recalled that even though Ahmadzadeh's treatise was important to him, Pouyan's work had been far more attractive and impressive. Hashemi recalled having received Jazani's last two works in the summer of 1975, from Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz who had been in the Fada'i leadership team (markaziyat) since April/May 1974.⁴⁹

▪

Hashemi had first read *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* and had not been impressed by it. He could neither really grasp it, nor was he convinced by its arguments. However, he found Jazani's *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship* to be a masterpiece (shahkar). It was not until around July 1976, at a safe house in Tehran, that he came across Jazani's *What a Revolutionary Should Know*. He remembered that the piece had seemed "rather alien/strange" to him (barayam qadri biganeh boud).⁵⁰

▪

Hashemi's experience demonstrated that for militants joining the Fada'is around mid-1976, Jazani's ideological campaign against Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh had not made a dent in the attraction for armed struggle. Familiar with the writings of both sides of the debate, Hashemi's reasoning for joining the Fada'is as a combatant is telling. He argued that "to me armed struggle was a compelling and rousing (barangizanandeh va bidarkonandeh) tactic, which had proven effective." Hashemi's chief objection to the Fada'i strategy at the time was that the organization "had failed to go among the workers to raise their consciousness and organize them".⁵¹

▪

For Hashemi, both Jazani and Pouyan-Ahmadzadeh's visions of armed struggle were compatible. Hashemi believed that during the period 1974–1976, the two opposing views of Ahmadzadeh and Jazani "easily coexisted with one another" among the combatants.⁵²

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Notes

[1](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 276.

[2](#)

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Mostafa Madani in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 108–109; Madani and Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp, 253, 391; Mehdi Same‘ in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 141.

[3](#)

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Dehqani, pp. 34–35. The introduction to this book was written by Hamid Ashraf in around Tir 1352. With thanks to Jamshid for verification of the date.

[4](#)

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Dehqani, pp. 34–35.

[5](#)

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Navidi, Heydar, and ‘Abdolrahimpour in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e*

Bijan Jazani, pp. 182, 250, 276; Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, pp. 409, 412.

[6](#)

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Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 251; Tabrizi, personal correspondence, 21 September 2019.

[7](#)

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Information in this paragraph is entirely based on Behrooz Mo‘azami, personal correspondence, 25 November 2018. For further information see: Vahabzadeh, pp. 157–160.

[8](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, Shahrivar 1349.

[9](#)

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(retrieved 22 August 2018); Heydar Tabrizi, p. 28.

[11](#)

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Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh started his clandestine life around September 1970 (Shahrivar 1349), Taher Ahmadzadeh, personal interview, 10 January 1998, Paris.

[12](#)

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H. Masali, *Jonbesh chap-e Iran*, n.p., n.d., pp. 125–126.

[13](#)

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[14](#)

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[15](#)

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[16](#)

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[17](#)

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[18](#)

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[19](#)

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[20](#)

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[29](#)

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[34](#)

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[35](#)

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[36](#)

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[37](#)

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[42](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 276.

[43](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 282.

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 282.

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 282.

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 283–284.

[49](#)

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‘Abbas Hashemi, personal correspondence through Shahram Qanbari, 7 July 2019.

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Hashemi, personal correspondence through Shahram Qanbari, 7 July 2019.

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Hashemi, personal correspondence through Shahram Qanbari, 7 July 2019.

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A. Hashemi, *Az birahehha-ye rah*, vol. 1, Hanover: Goftegouha-ye زندان, 1396, p. 207; Hashemi, personal correspondence through Shahram Qanbari, 7

July 2019.

Fada'i Leadership Debating Correct Methods of Struggle

As of March 1975, the Fada'i leadership was reviewing old methods of struggle to best serve the revolutionary movement. Jazani's prison writings, and his execution on 18 April 1975, impacted this debate, but it would be difficult to assess to what extent. Even though there are references to a new organizational statute and a series of resolutions reflecting changes in the Fada'is' practices and procedures, neither the new statute nor the resolutions have survived.¹

Furthermore, it is difficult to identify the new measures and ascertain the concrete steps taken by the Fada'is towards implementing them. The consensus among the old Fada'is who survived is that, starting in January 1976, the heavy blows against the Fada'is interrupted implementing the changes.

According to the single testimony of 'Abdolrahimpour, the changes discussed and adopted by the leadership included profound alterations. The Fada'is moved towards non-military economic and political activities as a fundamental method of struggle. They promoted engaging in propaganda and political activities among factory workers. The Fada'is decided not to organize new recruits into clandestine teams and instead engaged in establishing semi-clandestine teams. They decided to democratize their organizational structure and emphasized the importance of theoretical considerations in the leadership of the organization. Finally, they decided to downplay Maoist ideas while seeking new alignments with socialist countries of the Soviet Bloc.²

▪

If certain of these measures were to be accepted as facts, it would have to be assumed that as of March 1975, the Fada'i Organization had fully adopted Jazani's recommendations. This assumption would have implied an organizational metamorphosis not easily reconcilable with known Fada'i theory and practice between March 1975 and June 1976.

From the limited solid information available, it seems that the Fada'is were entertaining the idea of experimenting with non-military methods of struggle, although the exact process and modality of this experimentation remained vague. A transfiguration based on the lines that 'Abdolrahimpour suggests would have implied considerable dilution of Ahmadzadeh's influence. 'Abdolrahimpour maintains that sometime around February/March 1975 (Esfand 1353), Ahmadzadeh's book, *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic*, had been reprinted and ready to be distributed, but was then held back. 'Abdolrahimpour recalls that 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari had told him that the "serious criticism of Ahmadzadeh's views" by certain comrades had been the reason why the distribution of his book had been held back. Tabrizi confirms that Ahmadzadeh's text was not distributed and argues that it was the outcome of the debate that Jazani had launched on the availability of objective conditions of the revolution.³

▪

Tabrizi reasons that Jazani's emphasis on political and guild methods of struggle in *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* had certainly given weight to the proponents of paying attention to political and guild methods of struggle. Yet he also argues that the revolutionary practitioners had already been considering the necessity of organizing political and guild activities even before they came into contact with Jazani's prison writings.⁴

▪

To support his argument, Tabrizi posits that the importance of organizing such activities had been explicitly expressed in the fifth issue of *People's Combat*, published in December 1974/January 1975 (Dey 1353).⁵

▪

An analysis of the article in question in *People's Combat* will demonstrate that Tabrizi's claim is difficult to prove. The Fada'is remained loyal to armed struggle; they voiced support for political and guild activities, but they did not espouse or adopt them. In this issue of *People's Combat*, the Fada'is announced

that they “did not, in any manner, oppose working class guild, economic and political struggles”.⁶

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After the assassination of Mohammad-Sadeq Fateh-Yazdi on 11 August 1974, People’s Combat published an article called “A Few Words on the Social Impact of Fateh’s Revolutionary Execution”. The Fada’is condemned Fateh for his alleged role in the murder of twenty workers at Jahan Chit, one of his textile factories, and for his injustices towards his workers.

The article explained that the operation had aimed to attract not only the attention of progressive intellectuals, but most importantly, that of the working class. The Fada’is announced their support (e’lam-e hemayat) for “all types of guild, economic, and political struggles by the working class”. They hoped that their support would “gradually attract the broadest forces of the working class to the struggle”. The Fada’is promised to attract and absorb the “most conscious strata of workers who were willing to join the [Fada’i] revolutionary organization”.⁷

•

The article made two key references demonstrating that the Fada’is remained emphatic on their old method of pure armed struggle. People’s Combat reiterated that the Fada’is’ objective was to create a “broad organization of professional revolutionaries (enqelabiyoun-e herfeh’i)”. The article emphasized that Fada’i members would be “composed of revolutionary intellectuals and progressive workers, whose job or profession would be revolutionary activities”.⁸

•

In December 1974/January 1975, the Fada’is were envisaging an organization of professional revolutionaries. People’s Combat was inviting anyone ready to set aside public or semi-public activities to join the professional fighting revolutionaries. The Fada’is continued to consider themselves as a guerrilla force.

Acknowledging that the Fada’is supported working-class guild and political activities, People’s Combat posed the key question, “How will the workers’ struggle gain momentum?” The response left no room for ambiguity. The revolutionary vanguard, it stated, would carry out workers-related military operations. Then, through the distribution of explanatory pamphlets and

announcements, including statements supporting guild and political activities, it would gradually prepare the working class to enter the fray.⁹

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This type of military operation aimed at attracting the attention of workers came to be called “exemplary mass-oriented operations”. This position was in accord with the understanding of Debray, Marighella, Ahmadzadeh, and Ashraf of the notion of armed propaganda, but not with Jazani’s.

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A discreet Jazani special issue of people’s combat

After the execution of Jazani and six other founders of his group on 19 April 1975, People’s Combat published an eight-page article on this event. The piece entitled “The Shah’s Outrageous Crime Against the New Revolutionary Movement of the Iranian People” appeared on page 104 and was followed by an eleven-page article by Jazani. The Fada’is’ official organ introduced Jazani, presented a summary of his activities, and produced a short history of the remnants of Jazani’s Group. The Jazani Group was praised for having been composed of “some of the most enlightened, sincere and brightest communists in Iran”.

Jazani’s analysis of Iran’s social conditions and issues as related to the revolution (masa’el-e enqelab-e Iran) was said to reflect “deep consciousness/awareness, realism and revolutionary sincerity”.¹⁰

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Without being specific, the article referred to Jazani’s works as having been “regularly” sent out of prison to the guerrillas. The Fada’is were said to have reproduced and distributed Jazani’s works among supporters of the organization “on a limited scale”.¹¹

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There was, however, no reference to Jazani as the pioneer or the theoretician of armed struggle or to the Jazani Group as the forerunner of the Siyahkal assault.

People's Combat softly criticized some of Jazani's writings, attributing their shortcomings to prison conditions and limited communication with the Fada'i Organization. The publication pointed out that, at times, Jazani would generalize based on "rumours" that he had heard, or on the "limited literature available to him". In such cases, *People's Combat* suggested that the Fada'i Organization would send him its views, and Jazani would incorporate them. According to *People's Combat*, on occasions, Jazani's positions differed from those of the organization due to a breakdown in communication between them.¹²

▪

In closing, *People's Combat* announced that the Fada'i Organization had decided to print a collection of Jazani's writings, without mentioning the titles which were to be published.¹³

▪

Jazani's undated article which appeared in this issue was called "On Unity and the Strategic Role of the People's Fada'i Guerrillas". Its author was introduced as "The People's Fada'i guerrilla, comrade Bijan Jazani". In this article, Jazani first emphasized the principal role of "armed tactics" and called for working towards an alliance of all progressive and Marxist-Leninist groups in a broad liberation front. All participating groups would have to accept armed struggle as their method of operation throughout the various phases of the struggle. Jazani acknowledged that he was not optimistic about solidarity and unity among Marxist-Leninist groups, but pointed out that "those tendencies who have accepted armed struggle and act according to it enjoy a 'relative unity' (vahdat-e nesbi) in their strategies and tactics". Jazani lauded the "Siyahkal epic", the creation of the "People's Fada'i Guerrillas", and the founding of the armed struggle movement.¹⁴

▪

Jazani argued that "even if" yesterday the formation of revolutionary cells and the conduct of armed struggle "may have seemed overall correct", today a repetition (dar ja zadan) of that experience "could seriously damage the working class and liberation movement". Jazani identified the "People's Fada'i Guerrillas" as the axis which could, and should, bring about a broad Marxist-Leninist alliance. He conceded that the Fada'is had suffered from "shortcomings

and deficiencies” (kamboud-ha va naresa’i-ha) but added that they had “constantly evolved and overcome their weaknesses”. He reiterated the importance of armed struggle as the primary responsibility of the People’s Fada’i Guerrillas and called on all Marxist–Leninist organizations or political-military cells to put their forces at the disposal of the Fada’is. He summoned political and guild cells and groups to coordinate their activities with those of the armed struggle movement, propagate their ideas, and support the armed movement.¹⁵

▪

In this article, Jazani turned to the key strategic role of the People’s Fada’i Guerrillas in the movement and what that implied. He criticized the Fada’is for failing to create an active “behind the frontline” (posht-e jebbeh-ye fa’al) organization. In his assessment, these shortcomings had “sufficiently damaged the movement and needed to be dealt with”. Jazani argued that “if yesterday our most important responsibility was to begin the armed struggle”, today we can no longer limit the responsibilities of the Fada’is “to the previous plans”.

With an eye to mobilizing the masses and forging a mass struggle, Jazani called on the Fada’is to learn from the experiences of Iranian and international revolutionary movements in order to adopt the most correct “ideology of the working class”. He emphasized the importance of employing “all the possibilities of the workers’ movement to consolidate the armed struggle under the Fada’i banner”.¹⁶

▪

This piece by Jazani was rather unusual. Even though he criticized the Fada’i leadership for its organizational shortcomings since 1971, and promoted moving beyond pure armed struggle, his tone was conciliatory. He was calling for solidarity and unity within Marxist–Leninist movements under the leadership of the Fada’is.

The timing of the Jazani special issue coincided with major discussions within the Fada’i leadership on the appropriate methods of struggle. These discussions were said to have been fuelled by Jazani’s works. This issue of People’s Combat aimed at minimizing differences and at presenting an atmosphere of unity within the Fada’is. To iron out differences and display a united voice and purpose, Mo’meni wrote an important editorial called “The Slogans of Unity”, in which he tried to assimilate and incorporate certain ideas dear to Jazani, without abandoning the principle of armed struggle.

In his analysis, Mo'meni posited that the guerrillas had established and consolidated armed struggle in society. He then argued that the pivotal form (shekl-e mehvari) of struggle was armed propaganda, the validity of which was proven. To attract the masses, Mo'meni suggested, the guerrillas needed to conduct propaganda and educational work in accordance with the demands and struggles of the masses. This activity had to be done in conjunction with armed propaganda (dar kenar-e).¹⁷

▪

Mo'meni's editorial echoed partially Jazani's call for a "combined method" of struggle, although it fell short of promoting, political, legal, and peaceful methods of struggle. Mo'meni avoided reference to political or trade union activities as a responsibility of Fada'i, although these constituted Jazani's rallying cry for mobilizing the masses during the anti-dictatorial phase. Mo'meni referenced Jazani's notion of "armed propaganda as the pivotal form of struggle" (shekl-e mehvari). This could be considered as a nuanced concession to Jazani's ideas. Jazani had called armed propaganda the support (takiyeh-gah) of political activities during the anti-dictatorial phase, and had spoken of a combined or fused method (talfiqi) of struggle.¹⁸

▪

As of April–May 1975, the official Fada'i organ was superficially referring to some of Jazani's concepts without promoting the nexus of his idea.

▪

Growing a second leg?

Around the spring of 1975, the Fada'i leadership team placed some of Jazani's propositions on their agenda for discussion. The exact date, items, details, or outcome of these discussions are not very clear. The most controversial item of discussion was Jazani's insistence on organizing a guild and political branch. According to Tabrizi, three positions emerged on this issue. First, there were

those who paid lip service to establishing such a branch, yet they did not see much value in it. They resisted revising the structure of the organization, which was based on pure armed struggle. The second view defended Jazani's position of creating two distinct branches, political and military. The third position was against creating two distinct branches and believed in combining (talfiq) the responsibilities of the two branches under a single leadership. This outlook, according to Tabrizi, believed that units involved with "armed propaganda" could further their cause by organizing guild and political activities. The proponents of the third position were in favour of having public, non-clandestine teams. These teams would be composed of employees, workers, and students, who would infiltrate workplaces and factories under false identities. Tabrizi argued that it was this third view which came to prevail among the Fada'is.¹⁹

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According to Tabrizi, Jazani had believed in creating two distinct branches, political and military. This had been Jazani's position in *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*, but in *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*, his later work, Jazani had clearly called for a "combined method of struggle" (talfiqi).²⁰

•

The second and third views, suggested by Tabrizi, were based on Jazani's call for establishing a political branch.

Tabrizi suggested that during the debates among the revolutionary practitioners, "the majority of comrades" turned out to be in favour of focusing their energy on organizing activities around the working class. He recalled having seen a resolution (mosavabeh) by the Supreme Council of the Fada'is (Shoray-e 'aliy-e saze-man). This new broad-based body was constituted in the summer of 1975. Its role was to draw up six-month practical plans and was distinct from the leadership team (markaziyat).

According to Tabrizi, a resolution of the Supreme Council of the Fada'is stipulated that "80% of the organization's energy should focus on the workers' movement." This new focus on the workers' movement did not mean leaving only twenty percent of the organization's energy to military affairs. The eighty percent included military as well as non-military activities and encompassed operations such as the assassination of Fateh, an exemplary mass-oriented operation. According to Tabrizi, these armed operations were as much a part of this recent focus on the workers' movement, as were new publications intended

for the labouring class. Tabrizi recalled that this new plan, involving a substantial focus on the workers' movement, was unrelated to establishing a "second leg".²¹

▪

'Abdolrahimpour argued that the release of a number of Fada'i prisoners in 1973 and 1974, and the transfer of Jazani's writings from prison, played an important role in the reorientation of the Fada'is. According to 'Abdolrahimpour, the released political prisoners were predominantly supporters of Jazani's ideas. 'Abdolrahimpour had entered clandestine life around January 1975 and maintained that the leadership had already modified its position on armed struggle. In his assessment, "Excessive emphasis on military operations had been criticized, and more attention was being paid to political works." In the spring of 1975, he believed, the leadership team had accepted guild and political activities as one of the "foundations" of the Fada'i line (arkan-e mashi-e saze-man) and emphasized work among workers and toilers. Yet, 'Abdolrahimpour believed that the Fada'i leadership was not quite sure about ways to implement its new-found objective.²²

▪

From around August/September 1975 (avaset-e sal-e 1354), several workers' and publication teams, presumably committed to working in factories and publishing propaganda works, were established in various cities.²³

▪

From August to around December 1975, 'Abdolrahimpour was in charge of a workers' team in Rasht. This was a team of three whose members led a clandestine life. Two of its members worked "to attract suitable workers" to the organization. One member, Asghar (alias), worked as a technician in Haj Mohammad-Taqi Barkhordar's Toshiba factory in Rasht. Another, Golrokh Mahdavi, worked in a sewing workshop. 'Abdolrahimpour, the team leader, lived a completely clandestine life. Around September, 'Abdolrahimpour led an educational team of three. Hoseyn Ghabra'i, a teacher and a member of the team, did not live in the team's safe house but frequented it. The other two members led a clandestine life and were unemployed.²⁴

▪

From mid-1975, a number of Fada'i safe houses were composed of both members who led a completely clandestine life and members whose work

activities were public while their political activities were clandestine.

Sheyda Nabavi maintained that, at this time, the Fada'is continued to be “an armed political-military organization”. She did not recall armed operations being criticized within the organization. She did not experience Fada'is shifting towards political activities. She confirmed, however, that in their debates more attention was paid to political and guild activities, and especially workers' related projects. Nabavi remembered that from summer of 1975, several workers' teams had been established. Their objective was to work in factories and workshops, obtain first-hand experience of workers' issues, understand their personal problems, and become acquainted with them. Nabavi was member of a workers' team in the spring of 1976 and was employed in a battery manufacturing plant on the road to Karaj. Members of the workers' teams led a clandestine life and were armed. Under SAVAK's constant surveillance, team members had to be shuffled and dispatched to different cities. Nabavi recalled shuttling between a “reconnaissance team for armed operations”, a “publication team”, a “logistical or supplies team”, and a “workers' team”. She was stationed in Tehran, Gorgan, and Mashhad.²⁵

▪

Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz was a member of the Fada'i leadership team from around April/May 1974. He was later killed along with Ashraf on 29 June 1976. Hoseyni-Haqnavaz had confided in 'Abbas Hashemi some of the topics discussed at the Supreme Council of the Fada'is around 15 April 1975. During these meetings, sometimes lasting up to seventeen hours, Ashraf, Behrooz Armaghani, and Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran had raised issues and led the discussions. In one of these meetings, Ashraf had presented Jazani's “second leg” (matrah mikonad) and had argued that the “second leg” “was not attached to the first one as per human anatomy”. Ashraf had contended that this “second leg” was “an independent organism”, directed by a “liaison person”. Ashraf believed that a separate “particular organization, with its own specific forces”, had to be set up for the purpose of the “second leg”.²⁶

▪

Somewhere between March 1975 and February 1976, Ashraf prohibited further recruitment until the Fada'is had reorganized themselves. 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari, another member of the leadership team, had questioned Ashraf's decision to limit recruitment while talking about setting up the “second leg”. The “second leg” would have required more members. According to 'Abbas Hashemi,

Ashraf's ban was not to undermine the formation of a "second leg". Instead, Hashemi believed that Ashraf had become aware of three problems besieging the organization and hoped to address them by curtailing recruitment. First, in the face of the sudden surge in university recruits, Ashraf aimed at more scrutiny to assure the security of Fada'is. Second, Ashraf knew that the "second leg" would enable the organization's sympathizers to operate in open guild structures, avoiding clandestine life. Finally, Ashraf wished to address the issue of Fada'is working among workers to mobilize them.²⁷

▪

Around January 1976, Ashraf instructed members of a clandestine "educational team" to seek employment in factories. Ashraf argued that the guerrillas needed to experience the life of workers and find out what could be done to raise their consciousness. He recommended that those going to factories should first receive some training on how to best carry out their responsibilities. Around this time, a few members were organized in a Fada'i "workers' team", under the leadership of Nastaran Al-e Aqa.²⁸

▪

Their job was to infiltrate factories with forged identity cards, and to raise consciousness among factory workers. Such new teams, composed of clandestine members living in safe houses but working in open jobs, and establishing a "second leg" in a combined (talfiqi) manner, became the Fada'is' weak spot, ultimately causing their demise.

In May/June 1976, SAVAK identified two Fada'i members of a workers' team and placed them under close surveillance. SAVAK followed closely Nadali Pournaghme and Golrokh Mahdavi, members of Nastaran Al-e Aqa's "workers' team". It also kept a close watch on all their contacts, including Nastaran Al-e Aqa, who was in contact with Hamid Ashraf and Mohammad-Reza Yasrebi. The compromised Fada'i factory workers seem to have led SAVAK to strike the detrimental blows to the Fada'is in the spring and summer of 1976.²⁹

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▪

Political activities in 1976 discussions with the Marxist Mojahedin

Around January 1976, Hamid Ashraf and Behrooz Armaghani met with Taqi Shahram and Javad Qa'edi, who represented the Marxist Mojahedin. The two guerrilla organizations engaged in a series of talks and negotiations. In the course of their conversations, Shahram seemed amenable to collaborating with groups who believed in “political activities” and whose members worked in factories. Even though Shahram believed that involvement in “political activities” was a “deviant” undertaking, he tolerated it within the anti-regime front.³⁰

▪

Ashraf, on the other hand, dismissed the idea of revolutionaries conducting political work among workers in factories, even though he had sent Fada'i members to work in factories. He labelled those engaging in such practices as opportunists and followers of either the Tudeh Party or pro-Chinese groups.³¹

▪

So, one may wonder why Ashraf would be refuting political work among factory workers. Did he believe that the purpose of Fada'i's going to factories was more of a reconnaissance nature rather than establishing guild organizations and carrying out political propaganda?

Shahram picked up on the contradiction between Ashraf's position on political forms of struggle and Jazani's later works. He pointed out that the Fada'i's had published Jazani's *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*. To Shahram, Ashraf's position seemed to clash with the content of Jazani's work. In the face of Ashraf's refutation of political work in factories, Shahram argued correctly that Jazani's work indicated that some use could be made of “political activities”. He turned to Ashraf and said, “You have published it [Jazani's work], so you must believe in it.”

As if embarrassed by Shahram's observation, Ashraf's response was slippery and defensive. He said, “No, what we believe in is different from what these people do.” By “these people”, he meant the “opportunist” followers of the Tudeh Party and pro-Chinese groups, who promoted political activities among workers in factories. Ashraf found himself in a difficult position and tried to

distinguish between the Fada'is and “opportunist” organizations. He granted that the Fada'is went to factories, formed workers' teams, and carried out propaganda work among workers. But, he reaffirmed, “such activities did not constitute the principle or fundamental form” of Fada'i activities (shekl-e ousouliy-e kar).³²

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Ashraf seemed to be insisting that armed struggle remained the principal form of their activity.

Throughout the rest of the negotiation Ashraf continued to emphasize the importance of the “armed activists” in contrast to “political activists” (siyasi kar).³³

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Around six months before his death, Ashraf found himself in an awkward position concerning Jazani's new formulations, and the Fada'is' initiative to create the “second leg”. It seemed as though, for the sake of organizational unity and harmony, he refused to contradict openly Jazani's new formulations or shed doubt on the novel practices of his own organization. Ashraf was intent on maintaining organizational unity and preventing divisions within the Fada'is. Despite the debates, plans, and reorientations, in January 1976 Ashraf considered the Fada'is as first and foremost an armed military-political organization.

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Does Ashraf take sides in May/June 1976?

In the last issue of People's Combat, Hamid Ashraf wrote a testament-like editorial.³⁴

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This last piece of writing by Ashraf was, in fact, a five-year appraisal of the

Fada'is' activities. One of the main themes was Ashraf's assessment of Jazani's prison writings and their consequences. This work reflected the theoretical overlaps and discords between the two. Ashraf confirmed that three treatises constituted the "theoretical fundamentals of the armed movement" (asas teorik jonbesh-e mosallahaneh). These were Pouyan's *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Theory of Survival*, Ahmadzadeh's *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic*, and *What a Revolutionary Should Know*. Ashraf included *What a Revolutionary Should Know* in the repertoire of the Fada'is' "theoretical fundamentals". However, he refrained from adding Jazani's two known works, *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle* and *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*. His omission was deliberate and calculated.

Ashraf confirmed that Jazani had provided an analysis (jam'bandi) of the armed movement's experiences, and had expounded upon the theory of armed struggle, clarifying the future path. Yet, he also noted that Jazani's analysis had been conducted "in the regime's prison with limited opportunities and facilities".³⁵

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Providing his own analysis of the Fada'is' five-year experience, Ashraf explained that the armed struggle movement had begun in a condition of oppression, when all peaceful and clandestine political methods of struggle had failed. The main question lying before the revolutionaries was how to "smash the state machine". The sole (tanha va tanha) response, Ashraf maintained, was to employ "armed struggle as both tactic and strategy".³⁶

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This was an unmistakable message to the two sides of the debate.

Ashraf identified five objectives that the Fada'is pursued during the first phase of their strategic programme. First, to introduce armed struggle as the antithesis of dictatorial fascism. This move attracted the disoriented political forces frustrated by the political dead-end. Second, to deliver a fatal blow to the theory of passive survival, and the policy of "wait and see" among the politically conscious. Third, to prepare the practical conditions for launching "armed propaganda" to foster "revolutionary hope and excitement" among the politically conscious and to solicit their moral support. Fourth, to train revolutionary cadres capable of conducting the struggle throughout the enduring hard conditions. Fifth, to bolster armed propaganda, increasing explanatory campaigns related to it, "and also making use of political or guild forms of struggle around the axis of

armed propaganda”.

Ashraf argued that the above activities were necessary prerequisites for “entering the second strategic phase” of placing mass struggle on the movement’s agenda. Ashraf conceded the enormous problems and difficulties that beset them. He wrote, “We were fighting on several fronts while we were most feeble.”³⁷

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Ashraf claimed that despite all adversities and hardships, the devout combatants of the armed movement rose to the occasion with whatever means were available to them, tooth and nail, to fulfil the objectives of the first phase. He praised and defended his comrades-in-arms and wrote that “despite its ups and downs”, the selfless revolutionaries “ploughed through the bloody path of arrests and executions, with weapon in one hand, book in the other, and the pill of death under their tongue”.³⁸

▪

Ashraf presented in detail his understanding of armed propaganda from the movement’s inception. He referred to two stages of armed propaganda. The first phase, from 1971 to 1974, had relied on offensive operations like attacking military targets and banks. The object of these operations was to demonstrate the vulnerability of the regime and the guerrillas’ power. During the first phase, targets were not necessarily selected based on the masses’ particular and specific needs. Armed propaganda during the second phase, 1974–1975, was conducted through exemplary mass-oriented operations (‘amaliyat-e nemouneh’i khalqi). These were military operations with the objective of appealing to the masses. Furthermore, they were followed up by publicizing the cause of armed struggle. Exemplary mass-oriented operations were selected in accordance with the psychological and material needs of the people. According to Ashraf, aimless and unmethodical (bi-raviyeh) attacks on enemy facilities (ta’ sisat-e doshman) would be ineffective during the second phase, as they would be unpalpable for the masses. Blowing up movie theatres, banks, or government offices would no longer constitute mass operations as they failed to directly concern the masses. Ashraf labelled operations that did not fit into exemplary mass-oriented operations as adventurist.³⁹

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Ashraf was well aware of the fact that the Fada’is did not have a record of bombing movie theatres and banks. At first glance, Ashraf’s arguments

resembled Jazani's criticism of Fada'i military operations in *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship*.

Ashraf, in fact, was arguing for the primacy of well-planned and targeted military operations, with the maximum psychological impact on the masses. The object of such operations was to awaken and draw the working class into the armed movement, while carrying out propaganda around the military operations and disclosing the evils of the regime.⁴⁰

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The path from armed struggle to a mass struggle, according to Ashraf, was through more military operations that would appeal to the masses and not more political activities. To make this point clear, he embarked on criticizing those eclectic (elteqati) views that sought to combine (talfiq) the "theory of armed propaganda" with the "theory of peaceful/calm political work" (teori-e kar-e-aram-e siyasi).⁴¹

▪

Ashraf felt obliged to shed light on "certain ideas presented by some (barkhi) political currents in Iran under the guise of armed propaganda". The eclectic theory of armed propaganda, he argued, was bankrupt (mardoud), and it went against the grain of the authentic version of this theory, which placed primary emphasis on military operations.⁴²

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Ashraf was categorical in his criticism of Jazani's combined (talfiqi) method of struggle, and the partisans of this idea. What he could not say to Taqi Shahram, when put on the spot, he felt necessary to discuss with his comrades.

For Ashraf, the arguments made by the proponents of the eclectic theory of armed propaganda were embedded in opportunism. He submitted that such theories were not grounded "in a thorough understanding of the theoretical concepts of Iran's revolutionary movement, and had strayed in contradictory and different theoretical domains" (dar vadiy-e teorihay-e gonagoun va mote'arez sargardan mibashand).⁴³

▪

He summed up the main arguments of such eclectic theories. According to Ashraf, they believed that it was incorrect to engage in armed propaganda

without prior political and organizational activities among the masses. In their assessment, the armed movement was a petty-bourgeois movement since the masses were unaffected by it. They assumed the masses did not understand the complicated subject matter of armed struggle as articulated by the revolutionary intellectuals. Finally, they conceded the necessity of armed operations “every once in a while” (gah va bigah) but warned that one should not expect the masses to be affected by such actions. According to Ashraf, while such eclectic theories argued that armed struggle was in vain, they also argued that armed struggle, despite its complications, was a correct path and remained the means to attaining victory.⁴⁴

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According to Ashraf, a key criticism of the advocates of the eclectic theory of armed struggle was that the masses had become detached from the movement. Their disinterest was said to be because they were concerned with “simple economic struggles with political themes” and did not comprehend the “highly complicated themes of armed struggle”. The solution of eclectic theoreticians, according to Ashraf, comprised “political and organizational work among the masses” and the teaching of “classic Marxist” theories. The proponents of eclectic theories proposed that political and educational efforts among the masses should continue. Once the consciousness of the masses was raised to the level of the politically aware forces in society, these efforts would come to an end. It was only at that point that, according to them, the movement could become a mass movement. For Ashraf, such remedies as “peaceful/calm political work among the masses”, were not meaningful armed propaganda.⁴⁵

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Ashraf repeated the core concept of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh. He felt it so important that he underlined it in the text. He wrote that in Iran, “The possibility of political-organizational work among the masses does not exist.” He reiterated that armed struggle was an alternative to the long period of inertia which had halted the political life of the masses. Therefore, the authentic theory of armed propaganda, he argued, was based on “well-planned and revelatory political-military operations in an organic relation with informative propaganda work”. Ashraf added that “all guild/economic and political works among the masses could only (tanha) take shape around the pivot of armed propaganda.” Ashraf emphasized that the “Iranian communist armed movement had never opposed the theme of mass struggles, and in principle, its objective had been to mobilize the masses around the axis (hol-e mehvar) of armed movement”.⁴⁶

▪

For the sake of cohesion and unity, Ashraf encouraged revolutionaries to read all theoretical works on armed struggle, “especially the brilliant pamphlet by the martyred comrade, Bijan Jazani, entitled How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle” (Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh’i mishavad).⁴⁷

▪

For Ashraf, What a Revolutionary Should Know was required reading and How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle was recommended reading. Jazani’s Combatting the Shah’s Dictatorship was not even on his reading list. It would be difficult to guess whether Ashraf knew who had penned What a Revolutionary Should Know.

The last issue of People’s Combat (May–June 1976) reflected Ashraf’s position on the topic of armed struggle. One day after Hamid Mo’meni was killed in Tehran, on 13 February 1976, the Fada’is bombed the Governor’s Headquarters in Roudsar, in Gilan. In their explanatory pamphlet, the Fada’is informed Gilan’s workers, peasants, students, merchants, artisans, and government employees that their action was in support of the peasants’ just struggle. That explanatory note legitimized the attack on “enemy facilities” as an exemplary mass-oriented operation. Furthermore, the Fada’is announced that their military operation confirmed that the struggle launched at Siyahkal was continuing and growing. Addressing their compatriots, the Fada’is reminded them that they had started their armed struggle “with the firm conviction that the only correct way of struggling against the anti-mass regime was that of responding to coercion with coercion, violence with violence and, war with war”.⁴⁸

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In conclusion, the guerrillas explained that having chosen armed struggle, and resolved to continue with it, they welcomed the masses to join the struggle. Acknowledging that not everyone could take up arms, they hoped this would happen in the future. People’s Combat invited people to rebel. Yet, it kept the two realms of protest and strike, the legal methods of struggle, separated from armed struggle. It hoped that eventually legal protests would culminate in a mass armed movement. The Fada’is continued to glorify the guerrilla archetype of a selfless trailblazer with his finger on the trigger. People’s Combat ascertained that “without armed struggle, the revolution in Iran would not succeed.”⁴⁹

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As for Ashraf, in the final analysis, he did not stray from his position of military operations first and foremost. He had always believed in supplementing armed operations with propaganda work. The plan to distribute pamphlets at Siyahkal indicated that for him the two were never separate. The role of political and guild activities, for him, remained satellite or auxiliary operations. Ashraf's understanding of the role of armed operations in armed propaganda had not changed since his writing on the subject in April/May 1971 in his One-Year Assessment of Urban and Rural Guerrilla Struggle.

Notes

[1](#)

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Tabrizi, personal correspondence, 21 September 2019; ‘Abdolrahimpour in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 278.

[2](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp. 277; ‘Abdolrahimpour in *Atabaki and Mohajer*, vol. 1, pp. 233–234 ; Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp. 256–257; Tabrizi, personal correspondence, 21 September 2019.

[3](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour and Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp. 276, 252.

[4](#)

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Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar Bijan Jazani*, p. 252.

[5](#)

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Heydar in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar Bijan Jazani, pp. 251–252.

[6](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 5, Dey 1353, p. 71.

[7](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 5, p. 4.

[8](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 5, pp. 4, 67.

[9](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 5, pp. 71–72.

[10](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, Ordibehesht 1354, pp. 107–108.

[11](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, Ordibehesht 1354, p. 109.

[12](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, Ordibehesht 1354, pp. 109–110.

[13](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, Ordibehesht 1354, p. 110.

[14](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, pp. 112–113, 117–118.

[15](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, pp. 118–120.

[16](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, pp. 121–122.

[17](#)

▪

Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, pp. 8–9.

[18](#)

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Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 31–32, 63–66.

[19](#)

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Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, pp. 253–254.

[20](#)

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Jazani, *Chegouneh mobarezeh-ye mosallahaneh tudeh'i mishavad*, pp. 23–24; Jazani, *Mobramtarin masa'el-e jonbesh-e enqelabi-e ma dar lahzeh-ye konouni*, pp. 31, 35.

[21](#)

▪

Heydar in *Jongi dar bareh-e zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 257; Tabrizi, personal correspondence, 21 September 2019.

[22](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-e zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 277;
‘Abdolrahimpour in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 1, p. 215; ‘Abdolrahimpour,
private correspondance, 26 September 2015.

[23](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Jongi dar bareh-e zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, pp. 277;
‘Abdolrahimpour in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 1, p. 216.

[24](#)

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‘Abdolrahimpour in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 1, pp. 216–218;
‘Abdolrahimpour, personal correspondence, 26 September 2019.

[25](#)

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Sheyda Nabavi, private correspondence through Shahram Qanbari, 14
September 2019.

[26](#)

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Hashemi, vol. 1, p. 57.

[27](#)

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Hashemi, vol. 1, p. 57; Hashemi, personal correspondence through Shahram Qanbari, 7 July 2019.

[28](#)

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Faslnameh-ye motale'at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 2, p. 85. A'zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran's interrogation reports.

[29](#)

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Asqar Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 274, 281, 284, 288, 289, 293; Jilou's article is an excellent, in-depth, and thoroughly researched study of the fatal assaults on the Fada'i Organization during 1976; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 661–662.

[30](#)

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Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou, pp. 167–169.

[31](#)

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Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou, p. 171.

[32](#)

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Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou, pp. 172–173.

[33](#)

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Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran, Matn-e kamel-e neveshtari-e navar-e goftegou, pp. 197, 255, 278, 295.

[34](#)

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On the writing of this editorial by Ashraf, see 'Abbas Hashemi in Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani, p. 288; Marziyeh Shafi', Tarikh qevazat khahad kard, in Bepish, <https://bepish.org/node/2178>

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(retrieved 24 July 2019); Marziyeh (Shamsi) Tohidast Shafi' in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 1, p. 284.

[35](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 2.

[36](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 4. The emphasis on *tanha va tanha* is Ashraf's.

[37](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 4–5.

[38](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 6, 9.

[39](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 12–14, 17.

[40](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 134.

[41](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 18.

[42](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 18.

[43](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 130.

[44](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 129–130.

[45](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 129–130.

[46](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 131. The underlined emphasis is Ashraf's.

[47](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 136.

[48](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, Khordad 1355, p. 86. Emphasis is mine.

[49](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, pp. 1, 148, 158, 174, 179.

Bird's-Eye View of Armed Struggle (1971–1976)

In the aftermath of the Ranking Security Official's appearance on television, and his revelations about the Siyahkal strike, the regime was obliged to confront the guerrillas and the myth which had come to surround them. Battling the guerrillas exposed Tehran and other big cities in Iran to becoming an off and on theatre of war, with urban Iranians witnessing the conflict. The regime knew that it had to obtain quick and urgent information from arrested guerrillas to forestall the next military operation.

The regime was relying more than ever on torturing the "enemy" first and asking questions later. When SAVAK rounded up suspected dissidents, it did not know whether those arrested were involved with the guerrillas or not. Tales of SAVAK's heavy-handed policies and torture of political prisoners circulated. Those who spread political hearsay recounted heroic tales of the bravery, resistance, and obstinacy of SAVAK's victims. In Iran, where people did not trust the government-controlled press, it was political chitchat, rumour, and gossip that acted as the main medium of disseminating political news. In these interminable chains of accounts, the tenacious victims of SAVAK were sanctified, generating a deep sense of resentment towards a regime that was cruel towards its own children. Siyahkal, and the ensuing urban operations of the guerrillas, had forced the regime to become more brutal. In pursuit of its security, the regime made irreparable mistakes, increasingly tarnishing its own image. The consequences of the Siyahkal strike destabilized the Shah's regime in many more ways than either the guerrillas or the regime had imagined.

The Siyahkal strike, and the urban guerrilla war that ensued, brought pressure on the regime through three different, but interrelated, clusters of forces. First, the guerrillas were able to sustain their activities, making their presence felt in the life of Iranians. The news of their operations, offensive or defensive, was a constant reminder that a group of educated youth persevered in overthrowing the regime. Their durability marked the psyche of the urban population as, time and again, they were almost completely wiped out, but succeeded in reproducing and replenishing their ranks, and rising back from the ashes. Second, the activities of the guerrillas, and the harsh response of the regime, fomented further activism and unrest among students and intellectuals at home. Finally, the regime's waves of repression against the guerrilla movement and its sympathizers radicalized student activism abroad. Rallying around the abuse of human rights, the Confederation of Iranian Students harked on the "David and Goliath" situation in Iran to inform Westerners. The guerrilla movement had transformed the occasional student protesters into a tenacious subversive force. These radicalized student sympathizers, in turn, came to influence a considerably broader social and political base, domestically and internationally.

The activities and events of these three different clusters of forces overlapped and dovetailed at times, setting into motion a long interlacing chain reaction culminating in the overthrow of the Shah's regime. Guerrilla and student activities, at home and abroad, snowballed, then tapered off and even ebbed, but were never stamped out. From a historical perspective, these three different sets of activities fell into place like tumblers in a historical lock. The launching of armed struggle, and more specifically the Siyahkal strike, removed the invisible latch blocking the flow of events.¹

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The magic of the armed struggle movement was that it gradually dispelled the fear of resistance, contestation, and eventually rebellion. It made political acquiescence and submissiveness politically and ethically indecent and reprehensible.

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The guerrillas' persistent presence

On the same day that the Ranking Security Official appeared on television to assure the nation that the situation was under control, the press reported another attack. The previous night, on 3 April 1971 at 23:30, the guerrillas had carried out an attack against the Qolhak Police Station in retaliation for the execution of thirteen of their comrades. A five-man team composed of Mas'oud and Majid Ahmadzadeh, Hasan Nowrouzi, 'Abdol-Manaf Falaki, and Khalil Salmasinejad had carried out the operation under the command of Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh. They had disarmed the policeman on guard, seized his machine gun, and returned safely to their base. During this attack, two parked cars inside the police station were firebombed with Molotov cocktails, and one policeman, Habibollah Rahmani, was killed.²

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Four days after the event, the police announced a reward of 5,000 tomans for any information leading to the arrest of those involved in the “unprecedented and unusual murder” of Rahmani.³

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The reward money was announced on the front page of the popular newspapers.

On 7 April 1971, the new Military Prosecutor General, Ziaeddin Farsiyou, who had presided over the military court condemning the thirteen guerrillas to death, was assassinated.⁴

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At first, based on the comments of “informed authorities”, the press suggested that this was the work of “known members of the Confederation of Iranian Students, who had been in hiding”.⁵

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The five-man team conducting the vengeance operation was led by Eskandar Sadeqinejad, and included Saffari-Ashtiyani, Manouchehr Baha'ipour, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, and Hamid Ashraf. Farsiyou's car was first firebombed with a Molotov cocktail as he was leaving his house for work at 07:00. Farsiyou was shot and later died in hospital, and his son was injured. Both were assaulted

with the machine gun that had been seized at the Qolhak Police Station.⁶

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The attack was swift, and the firing team returned safely to its base.

The new political and military group, the People's Fada'i Guerrillas (Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq), was born after the assassination of General Farsiyou on 7 April 1971 out of the merger of the two groups, P-A-M and H-A-S.⁷

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According to Bahram Qobadi, both the name and the logo were adopted before 7 April 1971. They were said to have been prepared by the P-A-M Group right after the circulation of Ahmadzadeh's treatise around September 1970. Well before Siyahkal, the logo of a hand clasping a machine gun and protruding out of the map of Iran is said to have been designed by Mehrmoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan.⁸

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On 10 April 1971, three days after the attack on Farsiyou, newspapers published the pictures of nine young men, and announced reward money of 100,000 tomans for any information leading to the arrest of each. The handsome reward of the equivalent of \$13,000 indicated the importance SAVAK attached to capturing the wanted fugitives. In a week, the reward had jumped from 5,000 to 100,000 tomans, expressing the regime's anxiety. It expressed also SAVAK's estimation of what it would take to tempt the average urban folk to inform on the guerrillas. The prize offered for each of the wanted revolutionaries was the equivalent of a four-room house of 140 square metres located on the old Shemiran Road in the well-off northern neighbourhoods of Tehran.⁹

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The nine wanted fugitives were Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, Hamid Ashraf, Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Javad Salahi, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, Manouchehr Baha'ipour, 'Abbas Meftahi, Ahmad Zibrom, and Eskandar Sadeqinejad.¹⁰

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SAVAK was still in the dark about Ahmadzadeh's role in the Group. In its declarations, the police urgently requested the public to collaborate in the arrest of the assailants. It guaranteed anonymity and promised immunity to those who would turn themselves in and provide information.

Thousands of posters carrying the pictures of the nine outlaws appeared in buses, hotels, cinemas, shops, and public buildings throughout Tehran and the provinces. The caption read, “This person is a wanted fugitive and a dangerous murderer, information about him has a substantial reward.” People were instructed to inform the authorities and to arrest the bandits if they spotted them.¹¹

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Police announcements in newspapers called urgently on citizens to help find and arrest the nine wanted men. They referred to them as “madmen”, “murderous looking figures”, “evil beings”, “traitors”, “destructive mercenaries”, and “foreign agents”.¹²

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Bahram Qobadi recalled an enigmatic experience. Accompanied by Hamid Ashraf, whose face was on the posters, they would stand in front of the posters speaking to the bystanders about the saboteurs.¹³

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The regime’s campaign to villainize the guerrillas probably endeared them to the silent urban majority who recognized in them certain essential virtues. The ethical role models of the ordinary folk in the early 1970s were individuals such as Takhti (Gholam-Reza) and Shamshiri (haj Mohammad-Hasan) who were known for selflessness, fairness, courage, and generosity. They represented the self-made, politicized, unassuming, and caring friends of the ordinary people. The chivalry and self-sacrifice of the guerrillas, who were challenging dictatorship, echoed a similar kind of archetype. To a broad segment of the urban population, the guerrillas had become symbols of honour and phantom-like heroes. They could not be cheered in public but were praised and even idolized in private.

The Iranian press, a malleable tool in the hands of the regime, played a key role in putting the guerrillas in the public limelight. In his April 1971 appearance, the Ranking Security Official had been overconfident about SAVAK’s ability to rapidly terminate the guerrilla uprising, promising news and information transparency. For two and a half years, namely from 24 March 1971 to 27 September 1973, the Iranian press exercised partial transparency in relation to guerrilla-related news. During this period, the press published pre-approved security-related information on events which SAVAK felt were useful for its

objectives. The press was even given controlled latitude to produce some professional investigative journalism, as was the case with Keyhan's special report on the Siyahkal strike.

SAVAK must have believed that by highlighting the destructiveness and violence of guerrilla activities, and systematically exposing them as treacherous foreign agents, it could appeal to the patriotism of urban Iranians. For the regime, the partial transparency period was intended to serve two purposes. It was meant to demonstrate to Iranians, and to the world at large, that the regime was in full control of the political situation. It also intended to win over the urban population by demonizing the opposition, especially its armed faction. SAVAK failed to see that giving widespread coverage to the anti-regime activities could turn the guerrillas into heroes.

Another complication for SAVAK in 1971–1972 was that the Islamic guerrillas, who had long been preparing for armed struggle, were prompted by Siyahkal to enter their own military phase. Siyahkal was the cue for the leadership team of what later came to be known as the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (Sazman-e mojahedin-e khalq-e Iran) to launch their armed operations. The Mojahedin were incited to follow suit immediately, lest they would be accused of inactivity and mere verbalism.¹⁴

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The regime's practice of calling all guerrillas saboteurs (kharabkar) or terrorists, whether they were Marxist or Islamic, gave the impression of a broad and unified armed anti-regime movement. It was not until late August 1972 that, during Mehdi Reza'i's trial, the prosecutor brought up the distinction between the Marxist Fada'is and the Islamic Mojahedin. The regime subsequently dubbed the Mojahedin as Islamic Marxists.¹⁵

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Guerrillas highlighted: Partial transparency

21 March 1971 – 20 March 1972 (Iranian year 1350)

The Iranian press was a telling barometer of the regime's policies towards the guerrilla movement. From 21 March 1971 to 20 March 1972, the lead article of fifty-one issues of Iran's most influential Iranian dailies was dedicated to the Fada'is. Typically, guerrilla-related news appeared on the top half of the front-page in very large fonts, and sometimes in red, describing tales of shootings, bombings, explosions, street gun battles, deaths of policemen, "innocent bystanders", "partisans", and "saboteurs".¹⁶

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The content of these fifty-one issues also included interviews with recanting revolutionaries and news of executed "saboteurs". From around January 1972, when the Mojahedin began military operations, reference to activities of the "saboteurs" in the press included their operations in addition to those of the Fada'is.¹⁷

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In addition to the fifty-one issues, where news of the Fada'is appeared on the front page, there were eighteen other cases where such news appeared on pages 3, 4, and the last page. These inside pages published selective reports of the guerrillas' trials.

Some of the major events reported in the press during this period included the attack on the Qolhak Police Station, the assassination of General Farsiyou, and the killing of Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Eskandar Sadeqinejad, and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri during gun battles. Other topics covered included the trial and execution of the Ahmadzadeh brothers (Mas'oud and Majid) and the Meftahi brothers ('Abbas and Asadollah), along with other key members of the Mashhad and Tabriz branch of the old P-A-M Group. Although very limited coverage was given to statements made by the guerrillas at their trials, it was enough to give the public a sense of their objectives and resolve. During the semi-closed trials of the Fada'is, which opened on 24 January 1972, it became evident that the guerrillas had engaged in operations which the press had not reported on. The indictment against Asadollah Meftahi indicated that the guerrillas had successfully expropriated a branch of the Saderat Bank in the Nirouhava'i neighbourhood and had bombed a police station at Khaniabad.¹⁸

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Through the court hearings, Iranians were exposed to the ideological beliefs, methods, and political goals of the Fada'is. Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Bahman Ajang, 'Abdolkarim Hajiyan-Sehpoleh, Asghar Izadi, Javad Rahimzadeh-Oskou'i, and 'Abdolrahim Sabouri were quoted in the press as informing the court that they were Marxist–Leninists and members of the People's Fada'i Group. Hamid (Qasem) Arzpeyma was quoted as telling the court that “Siyahkal was necessary for the people to mature.” In court, 'Abdolrahim Sabouri confirmed what had been attributed to him in his interrogation statement, that the “ultimate objective of the group was regime change through armed uprising (qiyam-e mosallahaneh)”. The military prosecutor, Captain Afrasiyabi, informed the court that Asghar Izadi had told his interrogators that “the main path to reach our objective is armed struggle.” The Iranian public was told that according to Izadi, the Fada'is intended to “create guerrilla groups in the cities and attack military outposts, banks and other targets”. Finally, through Javad Rahimzadeh-Oskou'i, the public learnt that the Fada'is believed that their “struggle was just and anti-imperialist”. The press reported on Rahimzadeh-Oskou'i's insistence that they had opted for armed struggle as it was “the only method to succeed”.¹⁹

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The Iranian press was effectively propagating the ideas of the Fada'is.

Peter Ramsbotham, the British Ambassador to Iran, observed that 1971 was not only a year of “strikes and demonstrations on the campuses” but one of “gun battles on the streets, attempted kidnappings and bomb incidents; the start, in short, of a guerrilla-type opposition to the regime”.²⁰

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Even though the newspapers dedicated sixty-nine days to the news of the guerrillas, there were at least ten unreported cases of Fada'i activities. These included bombings of police stations, destruction of electricity pylons, attacks on banks, street shootings between the guerrillas and the security forces, and a grenade attack on the US Embassy.²¹

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Unreported events usually indicated operations which had been successful for the guerrillas and had led to no immediate arrest, injury, or death of the Fada'is. Street gunfights during which guerrillas had escaped police encirclements were not reported either. In such cases, the sizable number of passers-by witnessing

the small battles in the heart of large cities were the messengers recounting the events.

Tales of the death-defying exploits of Ahmad Zibrom, Hamid Ashraf, and Reza Reza'i (of the Mojahedin) made of them immortal champions of the underground resistance movement. On 27 May 1971, C.D.S. Drace-Francis of the British Embassy in Iran reported that "private comments from Iranians [have] revealed a good deal of sneaking sympathy with the bravado of the terrorists." He added that "certainly the whole of Tehran is talking about nothing else than the terrorists' exploits..."²²

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As early as 9 June 1971, SAVAK was voicing concern about "deviationist elements" widely using Siyahkal as a propaganda topic. Reports by SAVAK informants deplored the fact that members of the Siyahkal group were being praised as "heroes and vanguards".²³

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By 28 February 1972, the American Ambassador to Iran reported that "urban guerrilla activity has attracted some public sympathy and even admiration." In his opinion the execution of the guerrillas contributed "to the general anti-government disposition of the people".²⁴

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On Tuesday, 14 March 1972, SAVAK hoped to make an example of two highly popular football players, Parviz Qelichkhani, a veritable idol of football fans in Iran, and Mehdi Lavasani. For two days, the top half of the front pages of the press exposed their anti-state activities and reported on their arrest. The coverage given to their subversive pursuits was accompanied by excerpts of their recantation and the happy-ending news of their release.²⁵

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SAVAK's excessive zeal must have offended the non-political, young, happy-go-lucky football fans for whom Qelichkhani and Lavasani were heroes. Their arrest could have subsequently piqued the curiosity of the non-political youth to find out why football celebrities would become anti-Shah activists, prodding them to become politicized.

The Iranian year 1350 (21 March 1971 to 20 March 1972) tested the stamina,

determination, and mettle of the nascent Iranian guerrilla movement. The Fada'is were just recoiling from the military defeat and political victory of the Siyahkal assault. Right before the new year (17 March 1971), the regime inflicted a serious blow on the Fada'is by executing thirteen of their leading members. With the loss of Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani, Ghafour Hasanpour, and Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli, the Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa'i-Farahani Group was almost dismantled. Only Hamid Ashraf, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Eskandar Sadeqinejad survived as the principal representatives of the old H-A-S Group.

During the Iranian year 1350, the Fada'is carried out at least thirteen military operations. Nine Fada'i safe houses were compromised and came under attack. Sixteen members were arrested, nineteen were executed, ten were killed in gun battles, two were killed under torture, and one was killed from an explosion while producing Molotov cocktails. A Fada'i report, however, puts the total number of the Fada'is killed during this year at thirty-nine.²⁶

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On some eight occasions, information leading to attacks on safe houses, arrests, or shooting of Fada'is as they went to meet with comrades was obtained from arrested and tortured Fada'is. Losses inflicted on Fada'is were sometimes the consequence of mistakes made by them. Pouyan refused to abandon his safe house in the face of impending danger and disobeyed Eskandar Sadeqinejad's order to evacuate the house in the Nirouhava'i neighbourhood. His insubordination caused his own death as well as that of Rahmatollah Pirounaziri. The decision by 'Ali-Reza Nabdell and Javad Salahi to post announcements on the walls at Pamenar, around the Bazaar area, led to Javad Salahi's death and 'Ali-Reza Nabdell's arrest with further fallout.

Within four months (May–September) the change in the leadership team/central command (markaziyat) of the Fada'is reflected the speed at which their top cadres were being decimated. The first leadership team met on 17 May and included Pouyan, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, 'Abbas Meftahi, Ashraf, and Sadeqinejad. After the death of Pouyan and Sadeqinejad, the leadership team was narrowed to Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Meftahi, and Ashraf. Two days after the arrest of Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh on 26 July, the third (provisional) leadership team met. The new leadership was composed of Majid Ahmadzadeh, 'Abbas Meftahi, and Hamid Ashraf. After the arrest of 'Abbas Meftahi on 15 August and Majid Ahmadzadeh on around 24 August, the fourth leadership team composed of Ashraf, Asadollah Meftahi, Changiz Qobadi, and Hasan Nowrouzi

met on 26 August. Once Asadollah Meftahi was arrested on 12 September and Changiz Qobadi was killed on 30 September, there were only Ashraf and Nowrouzi that remained.

A significant feature of guerrilla activities during this period was the unprecedented presence of female comrades in the operational teams of the Fada'is. Shirin Mo'azed and Mohammad-'Ali Partovi constituted Ashraf's second team in late April 1971 and carried out a military operation against the Iran-America Cultural Centre on 17 January 1972. In another team commanded by Ashraf, Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan made her debut in May/June 1971. She was the first female Fada'i killed in a gun battle on 3 October 1971. Her spectacular stand in defence of the safe house on Abtahi Street has now become a part of the Fada'i legend.

Around the end of April 1971, Shahin Tavakoli joined Eskandar Sadeqinejad's team, and Ashraf Dehqani became a member of the publication team under Pouyan's command. Ashraf Dehqani was arrested on 13 May 1971, and Shahin Tavakoli was arrested on 24 May 1971. In May/June 1971, Roqiyeh Daneshgary joined one of the two teams under the command of Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh. She took charge of identifying the whereabouts and itinerary of Iranian high officials and foreign diplomats and became involved with manufacturing TNT. Sakineh Ja'fari, a member of the safe house led by Changiz Qobadi, was arrested on 30 September 1971. Nastaran Al-e Aqa, who had entered Tehran University's Engineering Faculty in 1967, was recruited by Hamid Ashraf in 1971. She, along with Zibrom and 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari were members of Hasan Nowrouzi's team. Three years later, she became a member of the Fada'i leadership team.

21 March 1972 – 20 March 1973 (Iranian year 1351)

From 21 March 1972 to 20 March 1973, the number of news items related to the guerrillas appearing on the top half of the front page of the press dropped from fifty-one to forty-four. The official term employed by the press to describe the guerrillas had become saboteurs (*kharabkar*). Newspapers gave considerable attention to street battles leading to the death of Saffari-Ashtiyani and Ahmad Zibrom. Saffari-Ashtiyani was designated as the "leader of the saboteurs", and

Zibrom as a “dangerous saboteur”.

The trial and execution of the founders of the People’s Mojahedin on 25 May 1972 was an important news item. The assassination of the warden of Tehran prisons, Brigadier General Taheri, by the Mojahedin on 13 August 1972, was given wide coverage by the press. The military operations of the Mojahedin, such as bombings at police stations, government buildings, and offices of foreign or foreign affiliated companies, were not reported in the press.²⁷

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During President Nixon’s visit to Tehran (30–31 May), the British Ambassador in Iran, Peter Ramsbotham, observed that “at least 10 bombs exploded in two days ... These bombs showed a degree of timing and organization that we had not previously seen.”²⁸

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On 12 June 1972, the US Department of State reported that “dissident activities over the past two years show that a violence-inclined ‘youth underground’ has taken root in Iran.” The report warned about the consequences of these activities “for the country’s long-term stability”. Based on interrogation of those arrested and statements by SAVAK and police officials, the report suggested that a minimum of several hundred, mainly middle-class young Iranians were involved in such dissident activities. According to the US Department of State, this “youth underground” was “sufficiently alienated from their government and society to accept the hardship of long-term clandestine life and personal danger in pursuit of radical change”. The report opined that dissidents were frequently in search of “no more than ‘revolution for the sake of revolution’”.²⁹

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In another report, dated 10 August 1972, Joseph Farland, the American Ambassador in Iran, gave a detailed four-month report of guerrilla operations since April 1972. He accounted for twenty-eight confirmed explosions, ten shoot-outs, and several other incidents, adding that there were “other unconfirmed incidents reported on [an] almost daily basis”. Farland insisted that increased reporting of guerrilla operations in the media “does not cover all incidents independently confirmed by the Embassy let alone the many guerrilla activity which are rumoured but not confirmed”. He concluded that “urban guerrilla activity is increasing”, “harsh” policies are unable to bring guerrillas under control, and heavy-handed policies “may provoke snow-ball effect of

action and reaction” leading to “broadening resentment among [the] populace against SAVAK’s pervasiveness and tactics”.³⁰

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Twelve days later, Farland warned that “too zealous a repression” by the security organization “is as likely to recruit new guerrillas as to stamp out old ones”.³¹

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The British Ambassador, Peter Ramsbotham, first dismissed the guerrilla activities as “amateurish and primitive”. Later, he heeded that “the increased opposition and its new methods of violence are worrying not only for the Shah but also for us.” The British Ambassador curiously asked, “Who are these people who are apparently prepared to face arrest, and in some cases, torture and execution for their beliefs and actions?” His answer was that “they are mainly young, probably between 18 and 30.” The majority, he posited, “are either graduates or students at universities” who are politically frustrated because of “the Shah’s autocratic rule”.³²

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The activities by the guerrillas were getting under the Shah’s skin. On 12 August 1972, David Hirst of the Guardian wrote a critical article about corruption and SAVAK, called “Graft, Violence, and Good Intentions”. The article infuriated the Shah. According to a 17 August 1972 report by Peter Ramsbotham, the Shah’s special concern was that the article was giving ammunition to Iran’s enemies, inside and outside the country, and was strengthening “dissident groups and guerrilla elements”.³³

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For the Fada’is, the Iranian year 1351 was one of reconstruction, regrouping, and consolidation. Their offensive military operations dwindled to a few. Concurrently, attacks on Fada’i safe houses also decreased to two cases in Tehran. During this year, new recruits joined the organization, new teams were formed, and Fada’i teams and safe houses were established in the provinces. Aside from new teams in Tehran, fresh Fada’i activities sprang up in Mashhad, Esfahan, and Ahvaz. The Fada’i casualties dropped to about twelve.³⁴

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Four guerrillas, including Saffari-Ashtiyani, Farrokh Sepehri, Faramarz Sharifi, and Reza Fazilatkalam were killed in gun battles on 24 and 29 July 1972 after

their safe houses were attacked. Zibrom was on a mission to detonate a time bomb when he was identified, surrounded by three teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee, and killed. Asadollah Bashardoust was killed in a gun battle with the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee in Esfahan. Poursan Yadollahi and Behrooz 'Abdi were killed in a blast at their safe house in Mashhad, probably while they were producing explosives. During this year, Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, a female guerrilla, became the commander of a few safe houses in Tehran and Karaj.

A distinguishing feature of the Iranian year 1351 was that with the death of Saffari-Ashtiyani and Zibrom, another page was turned in the history of the Fada'is. Hamid Ashraf was the only person who had lived through the transformations and mutations of the Jazani Group to the H-A-S Group, and later from the preparing and launching of the Siyahkal assault, to the merger of the two groups. He had been there from the conception to the birth of the Fada'is. Through their near collapse and reconstruction, Ashraf had been there. New teams were born with new recruits, while Ashraf remained the integrative and unifying personality of the organization.

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The news blackout and the Fada'is' rising success

21 March 1973 – 20 March 1974 (Iranian year 1352)

Traditionally, urban Iranians would gather every morning at newspaper stands throughout the cities. Stacks of newspapers would be neatly folded in such a way that only the top half of the front page would be visible. One could peep at the essential news items for a minute and walk away. SAVAK's partial transparency policy was helping the apolitical to become politically conscious and involved while heightening discontent among the politically aware.

Between 21 March 1973 and 20 March 1974, the number of daily newspaper issues where reports related to the “saboteurs” were printed on the top half of the front page was only twenty-eight. The plunge in official news reports was not due to a corresponding decline in urban armed activities, but rather reflected the decision to end the policy of partial transparency. By fall 1973, right before the opening of schools and universities, SAVAK made the executive decision to limit considerably the kind of information that was previously disseminated in the press. The change in course indicated that SAVAK’s initial policy of partial transparency had backfired.

A policy of a news blackout on guerrilla activities was imposed in fall 1973. The purpose of this measure was to spare further embarrassment to the Shah, who had announced the end of guerrilla activities on 27 September 1973. From 27 September to 20 March 1974, no news of guerrilla activities was reported in the press despite a flurry of guerrilla activities in February and early March of 1974.

To counter the news blackout, the Fada’i guerrillas published their underground publication Nabard-e Khalq (People’s Combat). The first issue of People’s Combat was dated 21 January 1974 (Bahman 1352). Between March 1973 and February 1974, the Fada’is kept a low profile and concentrated their efforts on recruitment and expanding their provincial and Tehran safe houses and teams. In April/May 1973, two teams in Shahi and Babolsar (in Mazandaran province) were founded under the command of ‘Abbas Kaboli and Mohammad Hormatipour. In June 1973, the circle around Mostafa Sho‘a‘iyan, and composed of Fatemeh Sa‘idi, her children, Naser and Arjang Shaygan-Shamasbi (ten and eleven years old), Marziyeh Ahmadi-Oskou’i, and Saba Bijanzadeh, joined the Fada’is.

The Fada’is conducted four military operations between 6 February and 1 March 1974. They targeted the central headquarters of the gendarmerie in Tehran, the Omani Embassy, the central offices of BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation), and the Shell Oil Company. Somewhere between four and eight Fada’is were killed, most notable among them Hasan Nowrouzi, a member of the leadership team, on 9 January 1974 in Lorestan, Yousef Zarkari in Esfahan, and Ebrahim Pourreza’i-Khaliq, who was arrested in Mashhad on 15 March 1974 and killed under torture two days later. The only significant attacks against Fada’i safe houses and teams during this year occurred in Mashhad between 13 and 16 March 1974.

21 March 1974 – 20 March 1975 (Iranian year 1353)

Despite the hike in guerrilla activities between 21 March 1974 and 20 March 1975, only one piece of news related to the guerrillas appeared on the top half of the front page of the press.³⁵

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This single news item (1 March 1975) reported on the discovery of a guerrilla base belonging to the Mojahedin with an emphasis on the fact that hashish and other drugs had been uncovered along with guns and ammunition.³⁶

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The news blackout on the Fada'i guerrilla activities during the Iranian year of 1353 was otherwise complete. The Fada'is carried out eleven operations. They were involved in six successful military operations, which included the bombing of two gendarmerie stations, one police station, two SAVAK headquarters, and a provincial headquarters. Four of their military operations were carried out concurrently on 8 February 1975, and two simultaneous attacks on SAVAK headquarters occurred on 18 March 1975. The attacks were carried out in four different cities and provinces, namely Babol (Mazandaran), Lahijan (Gilan), Mashhad (Khorasan), and Tehran (Tehran). The Fada'is robbed a company on the Andimeshk–Ahvaz road and got away with 250,000 tomans. Yet after August 1974, the Fada'is did not engage in any more bank robberies, which meant that they must have found other sources of financial support.

The guerrillas also carried out four assassination missions. Mohammad-Sadeq Fateh-Yazdi, an industrial tycoon, had his factories in Karaj and owned Jahan Industries, producing soap, cooking oil, tea, textiles, and blankets. He was assassinated on 11 August 1974. The Fada'is distributed a declaration announcing that Fateh, “the capitalist leech”, had been condemned to death in a “revolutionary people’s court” for his role in the murder of twenty workers at Jahan Chit, and for his injustices towards his workers. Major ‘Ali-Naqi Niktab’, a SAVAK interrogator at the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee, was assassinated on 30 December 1974. He had been responsible for the torture of Behrooz and Ashraf Dehqani. On 3 March 1975, Captain Yadollah Nowrouzi, the commander

of the University Guards at the Ariyamehr University of Technology, was assassinated for his involvement in the repression of student activities. 'Abbas-'Ali Shahryari was assassinated on 5 March 1975. He had been the chief of the Tudeh Party's Tehran Organization and a SAVAK informant, instrumental in the arrest of Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, Sa'id Kalantari, and Mohammad Choupanzadeh.³⁷

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The Fada'is were hitting military and security targets and taking out their political opponents. The total number of Fada'is killed during this year was eight, with approximately four of them killed in street gunfights. The concentration of their military operations, between 8 February and 18 March 1975, as well as their precision in taking out sensitive targets, must have destabilized the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Throughout this year, the arrests of Fada'is were far and few between. The Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee's inability to arrest the guerrillas and attack their safe houses was probably due to their inability to extract information from the arrested Fada'is.

On 26 April 1974, Marziyeh Ahmadi-Oskou'i was killed in a gun battle, and Shirin Mo'azed, another key Fada'i figure, was arrested. The assassination of Brigadier General Reza Zandipour, the second head of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee, by the Mojahedin, must have added to the regime's frustration and anxiety, forcing them to review their surveillance and monitoring tactics. In December 1974, the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee began a systematic campaign of door-to-door house searches in the south-eastern neighbourhoods of Tehran. The searches began at 22:30 and were carried out by approximately twenty units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee or some one hundred members of SAVAK and police. The houses were thoroughly inspected, and the identity cards of their residents were checked without a warrant.

During this year, the ratio of female to male members of Fada'i safe houses increased. On average, a safe house with four to five members had one to three female members. Female guerrillas were placed in command of safe houses and regularly took part in military operations. In May 1974, Saba Bijanzadeh became the commander of a safe house in Mashhad, and in December 1974 Nastaran Al-e Aqa led the team responsible for the assassination of 'Ali-Naqi Niktab'.

For the Fada'is, the Iranian year of 1353 was rather successful. The Golesorkhi affair had generated a new wave of sympathy for them. The student movement

had become more radicalized and overtly more pro-Fada'i. Overseas, CISNU (Confederation of Iranian Students National Unity) pledged allegiance to the guerrilla movement in Iran. From January 1975, leading Western newspapers, which had supported the Shah in the past, began writing articles on "Torture in Iran" and "Repression in Iran".³⁸

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Concurrently, voices of opposition to the Fada'is' method of armed struggle, led by Bijan Jazani, were becoming louder in Iranian prisons.

Accounts of political purges in this year

In 1974, stories began about internal purges of "cowardly", "turned", and "backtracking" Fada'is. Around April–May 1973, two Fada'i teams were founded in Mazandaran under the command of 'Abbas Kaboli and Mohammad Hormatipour. A member of this group of eight was Asad (alias). His real name, revealed some forty-six years later, was said to have been 'Ali-Akbar Hedayati, according to one account, and 'Ali-Akbar Hedayattabar-Nakhkola'i according to another account.³⁹

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Hedayati/Hedayattabar was said to have left his safe house without informing his comrades and had found employment with false papers in a company. He was said to have been knowledgeable about a Fada'i workshop, where grenades were being produced. An active member of the Fada'is had accidentally run into him on the street and had reported him to the Fada'i leadership. To minimize the risk of future exposures, the decision was made by the Fada'i leadership to execute him. Hasan Masali, a member of the Star Group, claimed that "Asad" was liquidated by the Fada'i leadership because of his opposition to "the guerrilla method of struggle" and "living underground".⁴⁰

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The exact date, place, reason for, and process of the execution of "Asad" remain unknown.

On 19 May 1976, the Iranian press reported widely on a letter by “the terrorists” on the “murder of three of their comrades”. This letter, signed by “Akbar”, allegedly Ashraf, had fallen into the hands of SAVAK. It contained a reference to the “trial and execution” of “Asad”, a weak member who was privy to information and wished “to discontinue” his membership in the organization. Evoking the security threat that “Asad” could have posed to the organization, the letter justified his execution. The letter referred to two other liquidated members, but provided no details about their identities, except that one was executed by “the martyred friend Nowrouzi” and the other by “Khosrow”.⁴¹

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The 11th Congress of the Organization of Iranian Fada’iyan (Majority), held in June 2010, issued a resolution on the internal liquidations of the Fada’is. It maintained that between 21 March 1972 (1351) and 20 March 1974 (1353), three Fada’is were murdered in internal purges.⁴²

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The resolution named ‘Ali-Akbar Hedayati (alias “Asad”) as one of the victims. The real identities or even aliases of the other two Fada’is liquidated were not known to the authors of the resolution. In effect, the Iranian Fada’is (Majority) confirmed the contents of the letter signed by “Akbar” and published in the Iranian press. Even Heydar Tabrizi, who confirmed the three internal purges, did not know the names, the dates of execution, and the executioners of the two mysterious “liquidated Fada’is”.⁴³

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There seems to be no trace or evidence of the two unknown liquidated members even in SAVAK files. The post-revolution official publications by the Islamic Republic’s research centres on the Fada’is have made no reference to the identity of the two liquidated members between the Iranian years 1351 and 1353. At the end of the day, the history of the Fada’is is left with two completely unaccounted “internal assassinations”, with no corpses to prove it. What is most peculiar is that relatives of the supposedly missing/assassinated Fada’is never came forth after the 1979 revolution to enquire about their missing dear ones.

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Changing tides: Expansion, exposure, and beleaguered

21 March 1975 – 20 March 1976 (Iranian year 1354)

From early 1975, there was a perceptible surge in radical university students seeking to join the ranks of the Fada'is. Some of the organizational problems of the Fada'is in 1976 were said to have been related to this sudden bulge in university recruits, and the physical problems of integrating them within the organization. This growing sympathy for the guerrillas was even reflected in a report by Anthony Parsons, the new British Ambassador to Iran. Parsons argued that until early 1975, the “small but significant minority” of the student population had “regularly provoked clashes involving as many of the students as possible”. Their tactics, he argued, changed in 1975 and they “went underground to try and undermine the regime secretly”. Parsons argued that “small groups of the discontented in universities spawn recruits for terrorist organizations.” With his solid faith in the Shah’s management skills, Parsons concluded, “Those brave enough to oppose directly the principles of the regime are likely to be detected by SAVAK and subjected to detention without trial and probably worse.”⁴⁴

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Between 21 March 1975 and 20 March 1976, there were twenty-four issues of the Iranian press where the story on the top half of the front page concerned the guerrillas. This was a net increase over the previous year. Reports covered the discovery and elimination of guerrilla hideouts, the death of guerrillas during gun battles, execution of guerrillas, and the assassination of two US military personnel. Reports were concentrated around April to August 1975 and the last day of December 1975 to 6 February 1976. No news was reported between August and the end of December.

On 13 April and 28 June, two safe houses, in Qazvin and in Karaj, were surrounded and attacked by teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. At the Qazvin safe house, Khashayar Sanjari, the team leader, was killed in a gun battle. The three other residents, Anoushiravan Lotfi, Mahmoud Namazi, and Mansour Farshidi, all students of the Engineering Faculty of Tehran University, were arrested. At a Karaj safe house, in a long and intense gunfight,

Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, the team commander, Martik Qazariyan, the last remnant of the Hirmanpour–Ahmadzadeh circle, Yadollah Zare‘-Karizi, and Mahmoud ‘Azimi-Bolouriyan were killed and A‘zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran was arrested.⁴⁵

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Of the nine residents of the two safe houses, five were university students who had been imprisoned for their political activities. They had subsequently joined the Fada’is and had gone underground after their release. In July, August, and September, new safe houses were established in Sari, Gorgan, and Tehran. At least seven of the thirteen residents of these safe houses were new recruits. Female veterans such as Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki in Gorgan and Saba Bijanzadeh in Tehran became safe house commanders.

On 7 January 1976, Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran was randomly identified by a SAVAK informer, Ahmad-Reza Karimi. Karimi accompanied SAVAK teams on routine patrolling of Tehran’s streets to identify and arrest guerrillas. The arrest of Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, a member of the Fada’i leadership team (markaziyat) and commander of the Fada’i forces in the North of Iran (Sari, Gorgan and Amol), set into motion a devastating domino effect.⁴⁶

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The first wave of blows against the Fada’i Organization began with his arrest. One day after Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran’s arrest (8 January 1976), a Fada’i safe house in Gorgan was attacked and one person was killed while two escaped. On 9 January, two safe houses, one in Amol and another in Sari, were attacked by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. In the simultaneous raids, one Fada’i was killed, two escaped, and Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, a member of the Fada’i leadership team, was arrested. On 11 January, Fatemeh (Shamsi) Naha’i, who had joined the Fada’is in 1974, was surrounded at Vali‘ahd Square in Sari, and was killed.

The second significant blow came at 07:00 on 26 January 1976. This was a single attack on a Fada’i safe house in the Maralan (Ghiyas) neighbourhood of Tabriz. In this attack, Fatemeh Afdarnia, Mas‘oud Parvaresh, Ja‘far Mohtashami, Majid Pirzad-Jahromi, and Mostafa Daqiqi-Hamedani were killed. According to Asghar Jilou, this attack was not connected to the early January 1976 attacks. This attack and the ones that followed against Fada’i safe houses are argued to have been the result of SAVAK’s change in surveillance and monitoring tactics.

Jilou argues that in 1976, SAVAK had come to rely heavily on controlling telephone networks and tapping the phones of Fada'is and their safe houses. He believes that SAVAK abandoned its practice of immediate arrests and instead opted for protracted and discreet surveillance tactics to trap the important actors. Finally, at this time, SAVAK is said to have used infiltrators to dismantle Fada'i safe houses. The widespread recruitment policy of the Fada'is during 1975–1976 enabled SAVAK to obtain information about Fada'i safe houses by close surveillance of active student sympathizers of the Fada'is who had not yet gone underground. The interaction between clandestine Fada'is and those who led a public life exposed the clandestine members of the Fada'is to exposure and extermination.⁴⁷

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The number of Fada'is killed in action during the period between 21 March 1975 and 20 March 1976 jumped to about thirty-five. Shirin Mo'azed, who had been arrested on 26 April 1974, was killed in prison on 22 May 1975. During this year, 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari, a member of the leadership team, was killed in a car accident, and Hamid Mo'meni, the Fada'is' prominent theoretician, was killed in a gun battle with units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Mo'meni's meeting with Kamal Fouladi at the latter's house was compromised when Fouladi was arrested two days before their regular meeting. Fouladi had led a public life and the two were working on the translation of Marx's Capital.⁴⁸

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The military operations of Fada'is during this year trickled down to the bombing of the Governor's Headquarters at Roudsar in Gilan, and two assassinations. The Fada'is were purposefully limiting their military operations, and focusing on expanding their propaganda efforts, especially through their publication, People's Combat, and workers-related activities. According to Heydar Tabrizi, Ashraf annulled the plan to assassinate Tehrani (Bahman Naderipour), the SAVAK interrogator.⁴⁹

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The Fada'is' first assassination of the year was the controversial execution of Ebrahim Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i on 21 May 1975. Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i was a student at Tehran's Polytechnic University and recruited by Hasanpour, probably during the academic year 1965–1966. He was also a member of the mountain team, which Hasanpour had constituted in October 1968. It is said that he was arrested by SAVAK on 10 February 1971, even

though the official request for his arrest was dated 1 February 1971.

On 19 and 23 April 1972, Noshirvanpour, along with three other left political prisoners, participated in a radio and television programme. In these interviews, which were widely reported in the press, the participants voiced their regret about their past political conduct. Noshirvanpour had posited that preventing a disaster like Siyahkal was the responsibility of intellectuals who failed to analyse the objective conditions of their society.⁵⁰

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The Fada'is announced the assassination of Noshirvanpour as “the execution of a traitor” and maintained that he had “served the enemy”. He was also accused of divulging information leading to the arrest of the urban team.⁵¹

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The second assassination operation was carried out right after the attack on the Fada'i safe houses in January 1976. At 07:45 on Tuesday, 3 February 1976, a team of guerrillas composed of Ahmad Gholamiyan-Langaroudi and Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz assassinated Hoseyn Nahidi. Nahidi had been the assistant director of Khorasan's SAVAK and the chief interrogator of political prisoners in Mashhad. In their “explanatory announcement” (e'lamiyeh towzihi), the Fada'is emphasized the fact that Nahidi was executed for his instrumental role in arresting and torturing the opposition. Nahidi was identified as an “impediment to the development and growth of the just movement of the people of Khorasan”.⁵²

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In his report of August 1975, Anthony Parsons referred to the year as one which “has not been good” internally. He argued that “the terrorist groups, small as they may be in numbers, are demonstrating increased sophistication and efficiency.”⁵³

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Parsons characterized them as “politically implacable” and opined that their “improved performance begins to suggest a new element of coordination between hitherto isolated cells”. In other words, Parsons, who had previously minimized the importance of the armed opposition and magnified the efficiency of SAVAK in dealing with them, was undergoing a change of heart.

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The Fada'is' relations with Libya, Palestinian groups, and the Soviet Union

From August/September 1975, relations between the Star Group and the Fada'is became strained and tense. The Star Group maintained that one of their main bones of contention with the Fada'is was their knowledge of a "dual secret": the internal purges/murders and covert relations between the Fada'is and the Soviet Union. Hasan Masali, a member of the Star Group, posited that the Fada'i leadership team had instructed the organization's representatives in Europe to secretly contact the Soviet Union. Masali claimed that the Fada'i representatives, Mohammad Hormatipour and Ashraf Dehqani, had been told to seek financial, military, and propaganda support from the Soviets.

According to Masali, contacts were made with the Soviet authorities, "Victor" and "Alexandre", in Beirut, Rome, and Sofia. Masali remembered that, even though the Soviets made promises, they were reluctant to provide any assistance. In Masali's assessment, the Soviets wanted to use the Fada'is to obtain sociopolitical and military information for themselves. They also wanted the Fada'is to demonstrate their loyalty by sending a congratulatory message to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on the occasion of the October Revolution (October 1976). The Fada'is did not dispatch such a message to the Soviets and Hamid Ashraf is said to have become enraged by the Soviet requests. Ashraf reportedly instructed the Fada'i representatives to inform the Soviets that "we are not spies."⁵⁴

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On 22 May 1976, the Iranian press published another revealing letter dated 6 April 1976, from "Akbar" to "comrade Negar". The newspaper headlines informed Iranians that, based on "classified information" obtained from safe houses and "confessions", the "terrorists" had been receiving dollars and arms from foreigners and were in return spying for "big brother". In this letter, the "terrorists" came across as eager to serve "big brother". They even asked "big

brother” for the kind of information they would need on the Iranian army.⁵⁵

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Masali claimed that parts of the letter that Hamid Ashraf had written to the Fada’i representatives in Europe was published in the Iranian press in 1976.⁵⁶

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This supposition would suggest that “Akbar” was in fact Hamid Ashraf. In the correspondence that Masali referred to initially, Ashraf was said to have become furious when the Soviets had asked for information about the Iranian army. In the letter published in the Iranian press in 1976, “Akbar” came across as most eager to serve the “big brother”. No independent information on the origin or genuineness of this letter or its attribution to Ashraf is available.

On the issue of the Fada’is’ relations with the Soviets, Parviz Sabeti, as SAVAK’s head of the Third Bureau, must have had access to all pertinent information concerning espionage by the Iranian opposition for the Soviets. In 2010, Sabeti claimed that from SAVAK’s point of view, the relation between the Fada’is and the KGB “was a certitude”. However, the only proof he offered was a reference to Masali’s book. In passing, Sabeti also pointed out that “the Americans”, by which one would assume he meant the CIA, were of the belief that the Fada’is had no relations with the KGB.⁵⁷

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The private position of Iranian policymakers on relations between the Fada’is and the Soviet Union was also revealing. When Anthony Parsons, the British Ambassador to Iran, asked the Shah about Russian involvement with the terrorists, he was told that “they were probably involved but at the end of a very long line.” In Parsons’s discussions with the Iranian Prime Minister, Amir-‘Abbas Hoveyda had confirmed that “the terrorists were definitely receiving aid from Libya and the Palestinians.”⁵⁸

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Hoveyda had not referred to the Soviets providing assistance to the Fada’is.

Vladimir Kuzichkin was dispatched to Iran in June 1977 as a KGB spy. Kuzichkin spoke Farsi. He had spent a year in Iran (December 1973 to 1974) as a student of the Soviet Institute of Asian and African Countries. Kuzichkin’s account of Soviet relations with the Fada’is is rather general and vague. In his

book, he lumped the Fada'is with the Mojahedin, and erroneously claimed that "both" underground organizations "had made their appearance in the late Fifties under the influence of Islamic Marxism".⁵⁹

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It is rather odd that Kuzichkin would have been so ignorant about the Fada'is and their Marxist–Leninist ideology.

Notwithstanding, the KGB's man in Tehran categorically claimed that "the Soviet Union never had any direct contacts with either the Mujahedin or Fedayin organizations." Kuzichkin argued that the Soviet Union did not give support to such organizations as it did not see any "prospects" for them coming to power. The Soviets' assessment was that SAVAK was in full control of the political situation and had "heavily infiltrated" both the Fada'is and the Mojahedin. Finally, according to Kuzichkin, the Soviets feared that the Shah would rupture diplomatic relations with them if they were to support such organizations.⁶⁰

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Kuzichkin made a sweeping statement without any further details, contending that "All approaches made to us by members of the Mujahidin and Fedayin organizations – and these were especially numerous until the mid-1970s – were simply ignored."⁶¹

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From the point of view of the KGB's man in Tehran, irrespective of the reasons, the Soviet Union did not care to support the Fada'is.

In the last issue of People's Combat, the Fada'is called the controversial letters published in the Iranian press (18 and 23 May 1976) forgeries manufactured by SAVAK. The Fada'is claimed that the letters were intended to smear their image. Without referring to specifics, the Fada'is seemed to be denying the double accusations of internal executions and "treasonous relations with foreign countries". The Fada'is confirmed, however, that they had had close relations with "revolutionaries across the world", and especially the liberation movements in the Middle East. These relations, they claimed, had never been a secret as the messages sent to the Fada'is by these movements were regularly published in People's Combat. In the spirit of internationalism, the Fada'is offered whatever help they could to the revolutionary forces throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. In return, they announced that they would welcome any such

assistance from them.⁶²

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Heydar Tabrizi, who acted as Hamid Ashraf's special envoy to Europe, recalled that "relations with the Soviets" were not the reason why the Star Group ended its efforts at assimilation with the Fada'is. During his stay in Europe, Tabrizi had heard nothing from Mohammad Hormatipour or Ashraf Dehqani about "relations with the Soviet Union". But he recalled having heard later from Hormatipour that he had once met with the Soviet Ambassador at a Palestinian function, and the two had spoken to one another. Since the summer of 1976, Hemad Sheybani had accompanied Hormatipour and Dehqani to all meetings with foreign dignitaries. Sheybani recalled no contacts with the Soviets. Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour, however, recalled that after the summer of 1976, Hormatipour and Dehqani provided the leadership inside the country with a special code, with which they could contact the Soviets, but no use was made of this code until the 1979 revolution.⁶³

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The shock of state terrorism

On Saturday morning, 19 April 1975, a rather short piece appeared on the top half of the front page of newspapers. It announced the death of nine political prisoners while escaping. The article informed readers that all nine "adventurist" political prisoners had been killed while attempting to escape from the bus transferring them to another prison.⁶⁴

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The public received the news with disbelief, as those "killed during their escape" were no ordinary prisoners. The nine included the founders of the Jazani, Zia-Zarifi, and Sourki Group, as well as four original members. Among those shot "while escaping" were two key members of the Mojahedin.

The seven Marxist revolutionaries, Bijan Jazani, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, ‘Abbas Sourki, Sa‘id (Mash‘ouf) Kalantari, ‘Aziz Sarmadi, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, and Mohammad Choupanzadeh, had been arrested between January and August 1968. They had been put on trial on 30 December 1968 and were serving prison sentences handed down by the military tribunal. They had been in prison for some seven years. The two key members of the Mojahedin were Kazem Zolanvar (Zolanvary) and Mostafa Javan-Khoshdel. Kazem Zolanvar, who had been in prison since 4 October 1972, was a member of the Mojahedin’s leadership team along with Ahmad and Reza Reza’i. He had been tried and was serving his prison term. Mostafa Javan-Khoshdel was also one of the original members of the Mojahedin who had been arrested in August 1972, put on trial, and given a life sentence.

SAVAK’s macabre execution of nine prominent political prisoners was later recounted by a member of the execution team. Bahman Naderipour, better known as Tehrani, was a SAVAK chief interrogator and torturer, who was arrested, put on trial, and executed after the 1979 revolution. According to the single testimony of Bahman Naderipour at his trial, Reza Attarpour (alias Hoseynzadeh), his superior, called him into his office on 27 March 1975. He was told that an operation was about to take place and that Sabeti had instructed him to take part in it.⁶⁵

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Naderipour told the court that on 18 April 1975, he and the other members of the operation met for lunch at a restaurant and were told by Attarpour that the time for the operation had come and that details of the plan had been studied and approved by Sabeti. According to Naderipour, the plan was “to kill a few members of these organizations”.⁶⁶

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Seven SAVAK agents were designated to carry out the execution. The deputy of SAVAK’s Fourth Bureau, Colonel ‘Abbas Vaziri, was also the warden of Evin prison. According to Naderipour, Vaziri too had been present during the killings, bringing the execution squad to eight.⁶⁷

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In the afternoon of Friday, 18 April 1975, the nine hand-picked political prisoners had been transported to the hilltops of Evin where they were blindfolded and seated in a row with their hands tied behind their backs.

Naderipour remembered that Reza Attarpour informed the nine that “the same way that your comrades pass summary judgments on our colleagues and leaders and carry them out, we too have condemned you and will carry out the verdict.” Subsequently, according to Naderipour, Colonel Vaziri opened fire with his machine gun. In a gory ritual, Naderipour remembered that each SAVAK member present took turns shooting at the political prisoners before a SAVAK operative, Sa‘di Jalil-Esfahani, finished off the nine revolutionaries with merciful pistol shots to the head.⁶⁸

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During one of his regular audiences with the Shah, Asadollah ‘Alam, Minister of Court, and the king’s close confidant, referred to the executions as a blunder which blemished the fine reputation of the country among the Iranian people and the world. The Shah’s reaction was rather baffling. He responded, “There was no other solution, they were all saboteurs and on the run; it would have been worse off.”⁶⁹

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‘Alam does not elaborate on the Shah’s ambiguous statement of “it would have been worse off.” The reader is left to think that, for the Shah, the situation would have been worse had they not been killed. Unable to bring the guerrilla movement to its heels, SAVAK was now upping the ante with the consent of the Shah. The executions sent a threatening message that more political prisoners could expect the same fate in retaliation for guerrilla operations.

Less than three weeks later, a SAVAK agent reported that, based on discussions with ordinary folk, the death of the nine prisoners had a “completely adverse effect on public opinion”. His report mentioned that even those who were supporters of the government believed that the nine had been assassinated, and that the escape was a cover-up. The report added that even employees of the office of the Prime Minister, to which SAVAK organizationally belonged, were expressing “sorrow and hatred”, regarding this event.⁷⁰

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The extrajudicial state executions occurred almost exactly a month after the assassination of Brigadier General Reza Zandipour. On 18 March 1975, Zandipour, the second head of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee, had been killed by the Mojahedin. In an act of desperation, SAVAK hoped to assert its authority, and sow fear by murdering nine political prisoners. During the last

three Iranian months of the year, Dey, Bahman, and Esfand 1353 (30 December to 18 March 1975), SAVAK was overwhelmed and flustered with the incessant blows of the guerrillas, both Marxist and Islamic.

On 8 May 1975, a US report on the political situation in Iran warned that the “problem of terrorism in Tehran” was becoming increasingly serious. It noted “almost daily skirmishes in the streets”, along with the distribution of leaflets and “sniping at policemen”. The report suggested that during the last year, some two hundred people had been killed in various confrontations with the terrorists.⁷¹

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Another US report, written almost concurrently, argued that “opposition to the Shah and his regime is entrenched among intellectuals,” and that “intellectual dissent has produced a climate in which acts of terrorism are increasing.”⁷²

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A third report on 7 October 1975 posited that 2,158 terrorists had been arrested by SAVAK between 21 March 1974 and 20 March 1975.⁷³

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A month after the extrajudicial execution of the nine political prisoners, the top half of the front page of the Iranian press reported: “Terrorists have shot dead two American officers.”⁷⁴

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The assassination took place at 06:30 on Wednesday, 21 May 1975. The Shah was returning from his visit to Washington and Paris on the same afternoon. Colonel Paul Shaffer and Lieutenant Colonel John Turner were US Air Force officers serving in the two-hundred-man US Military Assistance Advisory Group in Iran. Three assailants, armed with Uzi sub-machine guns, fled the scene.

Anonymous telephone calls to the United States Embassy and to several journalists claimed that the attacks had been carried out by the “Iranian People’s Fighters Organization” or the Mojahedin. The operations were “in retaliation for what the Mojahedin considered to be government atrocities against political prisoners”. A foreign diplomat confided to the New York Times’ reporter that the organization responsible was “one of the groups involved in acts of terrorism and dissidence that seem to have increased in recent years”.⁷⁵

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The assassination of the US military personnel was embarrassing for SAVAK. The waves of violence and counter-violence seemed to have become interminable.

▪
Fada'is under attack

21 March 1976 – 20 March 1977 (Iranian year 1355)

The year 1355 proved to be most challenging for the Iranian guerrilla movement. On the one hand, the ranks of Fada'i fighters seemed to be sufficiently replenished and even grew from 1975 onwards. In May 1976, R.J. Alston, of the British Embassy in Tehran, reported: "We suspect the cadres [of the "cherikha"] are resupplied annually from the ranks of student dissidents."⁷⁶

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On the other hand, the Fada'is were facing an acute absorption problem which turned into a security nightmare. Beleaguered by SAVAK, which was consistently tightening its siege, the Fada'is needed to guarantee the safe transition of public or semi-clandestine recruits into clandestine safe houses. There was also the experimentation with mixed safe houses including both clandestine and semi-public members who went about their everyday lives. The enthusiastic and dedicated but untrained student recruits posed a major safety hazard for the organization as their unintended security oversights could pose fatal threats to their clandestine contacts.

The year's first blow against the Fada'is came almost three months after the Tabriz attack of 26 January 1976. Between Tuesday 16 May and Saturday 29 May, the Fada'is suffered huge losses at the hands of the Anti-Sabotage Joint

Committee. During these bloody thirteen days, eight safe houses came under attack, five in Tehran and one each in Karaj, Rasht, and Qazvin. On Sunday, 16 May 1976, crowds witnessed gun battles and car chases in busy neighbourhoods of Tehran. Five important safe houses on Khayam Street, Kouy-e Kan, Narmak, Shareq Street, and Shahr-e Ziba were attacked one after the other. The safe house in Narmak was evacuated before it was attacked. The main objective of this broad, patiently planned, and well-coordinated campaign was to find and kill Hamid Ashraf.

The attacks started at 02:00 when government forces hurled grenades, and machine-gunned a Fada'i safe house at 8 Khayam Street in the neighbourhood of Tehran-No. After some ninety minutes of gun battle, six of the residents were killed and Hamid Ashraf escaped. At 05:00, a second safe house at Kouy-e Kan was attacked by government forces, and its five residents were killed. At 13:00, the third safe house at Shareq Street, in the Nezamabad neighbourhood, came under attack. The team retreating from Shareq Street included Hamid Ashraf, who had been injured in the leg during the earlier attack in Tehran-No and had found refuge at the Shareq Street safe house at around 06:15. The retreating team of four, composed of two women, Saba Bijanzadeh and Nadereh Hashemi, and two men, 'Abdolreza Kalantar-Neystanaki and Hamid Ashraf, succeeded in breaking out of the police and SAVAK encirclement. The press reported on the death of five policemen, including Police Colonel Gholam-Reza Fardad, at the hands of the guerrillas.⁷⁷

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Around 03:30 on 18 May 1976, SAVAK conducted three concomitant attacks against important provincial Fada'i bases. In the attack on the safe house in Rasht, Behrooz Armaghani, Zohreh Modir-Shanehchi, Manouchehr Hamedi, and two other guerrillas were killed. In the raid on a safe house in Qazvin, Mitra Bolbolsefat and Esmā'il 'Abedi were killed. During the raid on the safe house in Karaj, Farideh Gharavi, Hoseyn Fatemi, and another guerrilla, probably Houshang Qorbani, were killed.⁷⁸

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In two days, twenty-one Fada'is were killed in clashes. On 29 May, the safe house at the Shahr-e Ziba neighbourhood in Tehran came under attack. Of its eight occupants, Mina Talebzadeh-Shoushtari was killed during the strike while the others escaped. The identification and destruction of safe houses placed pressure on the Fada'is to find and rent new housing, relocate their clandestine

members, and most importantly figure out how they had become compromised.

For a while, the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee had kept the guerrillas' safe houses under surveillance and had identified their whereabouts through wiretaps. The absence of physical tailing and perceptible surveillance by SAVAK, since the Tabriz attack, had raised suspicions among the Fada'is. The fact that for some three months there had been no street clashes resulting from such surveillance, had seemed odd to the Fada'is. It has been suggested that the leadership team of the Fada'is suspected that the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee had them under surveillance and was waiting for the opportune time to pounce. They had therefore decided to test their organizational safety and security by planning a military operation. Through their wiretapping methods, SAVAK launched its preventive strike of 16 May, on the exact day that the Fada'is had planned their military operation. It has also been argued that the May strikes may have been launched to prevent the publication of the seventh issue of People's Combat.⁷⁹

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The year's second and decisive series of blows began on the first day of summer and lasted eight days. Less than a month after the May attacks, the Fada'is came again to the brink of total annihilation. This crucial phase began at 10:30 on Monday, 21 June 1976. Two members of a safe house which had been under SAVAK's surveillance were tailed, surrounded, and attacked, in two different parts of Tehran, and were killed after a gun battle. Two days later, at 17:30, three Fada'is, including Nastaran Al-e Aqa, a member of the leadership team, were followed by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee and killed in gun battles.⁸⁰

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Desperate to find the whereabouts of Ashraf and the remaining guerrillas, SAVAK let it be known through the press that families residing in houses and apartments had to report to the police the list of individuals living under their roof. The news printed in red on the top part of the front page reminded landlords of their duty to report the identity of all tenants. Iranians were warned that anyone refusing to comply would be imprisoned.⁸¹

▪

On 26 May 1976, Asadollah 'Alam reported that the Shah was in a foul mood over the inability of security forces to uproot the guerrillas and stop the

university students' support for their cause. The Shah had lashed out at his Minister of Court saying, "If all these saboteurs are not found and handed over to the proper authorities, I will punish you all most harshly (pedar shoma ra dar khaham avard)."82

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In a letter attributed to Hamid Ashraf, dated 10 June 1976, he acknowledged that during the month of Ordibehesht (21 April to 21 May 1976) the Fada'i Organization "experienced the most serious onslaught of the enemy in its entire politico-military history". In Ashraf's assessment, the Fada'is lost fifteen bases and approximately half a million tomans' worth of equipment and supplies. Ashraf proposed a three-month breathing space to reconstruct the Fada'i Organization. He suggested restoring and bolstering the logistical support facilities behind the front lines, training of members who had entered clandestine life, reassessing organizational weaknesses, developing new systems to confront the enemy's modern techniques, and the creation of a few model vanguard units. He cautioned against any precipitous and hurried decisions.⁸³

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Ashraf was unable to follow through on his proposal of revamping the Fada'i Organization.

At 03:30 on Tuesday, 29 June, the safe house on Reza-Shah Kabir Alley, Pars Street, at Mehrabad Jonoubi, was attacked from land and air. The leadership team of the Fada'is had gathered at this safe house for an important meeting to assess the organization's situation. The battle against Mehrabad Jonoubi safe house was conducted by the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee elite forces of forty teams (around two hundred men) and lasted approximately four hours. The press, some of which had three reprints on that day, referred to the fighting as "a big armed clash in Tehran" during which "Hamid Ashraf, a member of the Siyahkal group, was killed," and "the main headquarters of the communist terrorists of Iran were destroyed."⁸⁴

▪

Not all residents of Mehrabad Jonoubi were high-ranking members of the Fada'i leadership – some had been temporarily sheltered there after the May assaults on Fada'i safe houses. At least three were members of the Gilan branch who had come to Tehran after the May strikes. The eleven Fada'is killed in this key battle were Hamid Ashraf, Mohammad-Reza Yasrebi, Mohammad-Hoseyn Haqnavaz,

Gholamali Kharatpour, Mohammad-Mehdi Foqani, ‘Asgar Hoseyni-Abardehi, Yousef Qane‘-Khoshkebijari, Tahereh Khorram, Gholamreza Layeq-Mehrabani, ‘Ali-Akbar Vaziri-Asfarjani, and Fatemeh Hoseyni. The Fada’is had lost every member of their leadership team.

While the Mehrabad Jonoubi safe house was being surrounded, SAVAK had urgently transported Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki and Mehdi Same‘ from their prison cells to the battle scene to identify Ashraf. Pointing to a dead body with a bullet wound in the forehead, lying on the rooftop of the house, Azodi (Mohammad-Hasan Naseri) asked the two, “Is this him?” To which, the two identified “him” as Ashraf. Azodi ran to the ridge of the rooftop and yelled to those below, “Both confirmed, it is him.”⁸⁵

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The casualties incurred by the Fada’is during the Iranian year 1355 came to some sixty-nine members.⁸⁶

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The Fada’is without Ashraf

Hamid Ashraf, the legendary leader of the Fada’is, fell at the age of twenty-nine. For five years, the omnipresent commander of the Fada’i guerrillas had slipped through the hands of SAVAK, inflicting blows and humiliating it. With the loss of Ashraf and other members of the Fada’i “central” command on 29 June 1976, the guerrillas lost their captain, their rudder, and their most experienced cadres. For the first time since the organization’s inception, the Fada’is became “headless”.⁸⁷

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At 13:00 on Tuesday, 29 June, Marziyeh Shafi‘ heard of Ashraf’s death as members of her safe house listened to the news on the radio. A few days before, she had helped Ashraf write and prepare the last issue of People’s Combat.

Marziyeh grieved the loss of what she called “our only hope and linchpin”. To her, “Hamid was our father. Hamid’s very being meant that the organization was alive.”⁸⁸

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The sorrow of the Fada’is was matched with the joy of their adversaries. D.A. Jones of the British Embassy in Tehran reported that “the authorities are jubilant that amongst those killed was Hamid Ashraf, the last of the Siahkal group of terrorists.”⁸⁹

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Recoiling before the tragedy, the Fada’is could only retreat, huddle, protect their remaining members, and try to reconnect with cut-off members who were still alive. Damage control was the most important concern of the shattered organization. It has been suggested that after the 29 June blow, and considering the deadly May assaults, the organization had lost sixty percent of its clandestine members, including its entire leadership team. From the four to five nationwide branches of the organization, with some one hundred clandestine members, only one branch remained intact with some thirty-two members. Furthermore, communication was ruptured between the branches and the teams.⁹⁰

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With the loss of Ashraf and the leadership team, unity collapsed, and three different tendencies emerged among the remaining members. One group remained loyal to Ahmadzadeh’s positions. Another group came out in support of political rather than military methods of struggle. A third group defended Jazani’s combined discourse. Once the supporters of the second group parted ways with the Fada’is around the winter of 1976–1977, the clandestine members of the Fada’is officially accepted the Jazani line. Subsequently, the new leadership team decided to announce the resumption of its activities through a political declaration and not a military operation.⁹¹

▪

But armed struggle did not disappear. From 26 July 1976 to 13 March 1977, the Iranian press continued to report on continued “terrorist” activities and street gun battles. The regime attributed the new wave of guerrilla activities to “the Islamic Marxists”. Urban armed struggle diminished dramatically during the first half of the Iranian year 1356 (21 March 1977 to 10 October 1977). Out of five reported armed clashes between the guerrillas and the security forces, two gun battles

involved members of the Fada'i guerrillas.⁹²

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The experience of six and a half years of regular gun battles in Tehran and major Iranian cities had informed average Iranian urbanites that a serious political and social anomaly existed. The years of armed struggle had sensitized ordinary urban people to the repression of the politically discontented around them. By 1977, guerrilla operations in Iran, both Marxist and Islamic, had transformed urban Iranians.

As compared to 1970, people were more politicized, emboldened, entitled, and mutinous, looking for an opportunity to pounce. The post-Ashraf leadership of the Fada'is, which had adopted the Jazani line, was decreasing the organization's dosage of combat and militancy. In its place, it was increasing the portion of peaceful political methods of struggle. The common people, almost beholden to the tradition and ethics of the Siyahkal Fada'is, were preparing to add a greater dosage of bellicosity to their political mode of struggle. A synthesis of the two opposing views in the Fada'i movement fostered a belligerent anti-regime non-armed spontaneous mass struggle.

Notes

[1](#)

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Siyahkal and its aftermath provided an archetype for the growing followers of Shari‘ati’s insurrectionary discourse unleashing another key cluster of forces against the regime.

[2](#)

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Ettela‘at, 16 Farvardin 1350; Ashraf Jam‘bandi-e seh saleh, p. 15; Cherikha-ye fada’i-e khalq, Pareh’i az tajrobiyat-e jang-e cheriki-e shahri dar Iran, Sazemanha-ye jebbeh-ye melli-ye Iran dar kharej az keshvar, Mordad 1352, pp. 1–9. Hereafter: Cherikha-ye fada’i-e khalq, Pareh’i az tajrobiyat-e jang-e cheriki-e.

[3](#)

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Keyhan and Ettela‘at, 19 Farvardin 1350.

[4](#)

▪

Keyhan and Ettela‘at, 18 Farvardin 1350.

[5](#)

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Keyhan, 19 Farvardin 1350.

[6](#)

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Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq, Pareh'i az tajrobiyat-e jang-e cheriki-e, pp. 10–16; Ashraf Jam'bandi-e seh saleh, p. 13; Ettela'at, 18, 19 Farvardin 1350.

[7](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, p. 330.

[8](#)

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Bahram Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), p. 61; personal correspondence, 4 August 2019.

[9](#)

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Ettela'at, 21 Farvardin 1350, p. 10.

[10](#)

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Ettela'at, 21 Farvardin 1350. The Ettela'at text misspelt the names of Pirounaziri and Baha'ipour.

[11](#)

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Keyhan and Ettela'at, 21, 25 Farvardin 1350.

[12](#)

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Keyhan, 19, 21 Farvardin 1350.

[13](#)

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Qobadi, chapter one (Bahram), p. 56.

[14](#)

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M-M. Ja'fari, Sazman-e mojahedin-e khalq az daroun, Tehran: Nashr-e negah-e emrooz, 1383, p. 68; Meysami, vol. 1. pp. 380–383; A-H. Eftekhari-Rad, Zaman-e baz yafteh: khaterat-e siyasi-e bahman bazargani, Tehran: Akhtaran, 1397, p. 119.

[15](#)

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Ettela'at, 5 Shahrivar 1352.

[16](#)

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Based on Ettela'at and assuming that the security-related reports of Keyhan were almost identical.

[17](#)

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The first proclamation of the Mojahedin announcing their official name, Sazeman-e mojahedin-e khalq-e Iran, was issued on 9 February 1972. See Jam'i az pajouheshgaran, Sazeman-e mojahedin-e khalq: peyda'i ta farjam, vol. 1, Tehran: Moaseseh-ye motale'at va pajouheshha-ye siyasi, 1384, p. 489; Eftekhari-Rad, p. 148.

[18](#)

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Ettela'at, 9 Bahman 1350.

[19](#)

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Ettela'at, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18 Bahman 1350.

[20](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/1881, NBP 1/3, "Terrorism in Iran", 17 June 1972.

[21](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, shomareh 4, Mordad 1353; *Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq, Pareh'i az tajrobiyat-e jang-e cheriki-e*, pp. 67, 70, 80, 90, 128.

[22](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 17/1515, NEP 1/8, “Acts of Terrorism in Iran”, 1971.

[23](#)

▪

Rowhani, p. 1143.

[24](#)

▪

Foreign Relations United States (FRUS) 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Iran–Iraq, document 168.

[25](#)

▪

Ettela'at, 24, 25 Esfand 1350.

[26](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, <http://www.iran-nabard.com/40%20sal/shohada.htm>

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(retrieved 8 October 2018). This report is used as a base for the number of Fada'is killed.

[27](#)

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Jam' i az pajouheshgaran, Sazeman-e mojahedin-e khalq: peyda' i ta farjam, vol. 1, pp. 532–534, 545–546; FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 218.

[28](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/1881, NBP 1/3, “Terrorism in Iran”, 17 June 1972.

[29](#)

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FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 203.

[30](#)

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FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 217.

[31](#)

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FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 218.

[32](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/1881, NBP 1/3, “Terrorism in Iran”, 17 June 1972.

[33](#)

▪

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/1882, NBP 1/7, “The Political Situation in Iran, 1972”.

[34](#)

▪

Nabard-e Khalq, <http://www.iran-nabard.com/40%20sal/shohada.htm>

▪

(retrieved 8 October 2018).

[35](#)

▪

For news of some twenty-three guerrilla operations, by both the Marxist and Islamic guerrillas, during this period see: *Nabard-e Khalq*, nos. 3 (Khordad 1353), 4 (Mordad 1353), 5 (Dey 1353), and *Zamimeh-ye Nabard-e Khalq*, Esfand 1353.

[36](#)

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Ettela'at, 10 Esfand 1353.

[37](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, shomareh 6 (Ordibehesht 1354); Zamimeh-ye Nabard-e Khalq, Esfand 1353.

[38](#)

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Sunday Times, 19 January 1975; New York Times, 16 March 1975.

[39](#)

▪

M. Naderi, *Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq*, vol. 2, Tehran: Moaseseh-ye motale'at va pajouheshha-ye siyasi, 1390, page, Noon; *Dar bareh-e qatlha-ye daroun sazemani dar saze-man-e cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq*, <http://asre-nou.net/php/view.php?objnr=10399>

▪

(retrieved 25 June 2019).

[40](#)

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Heydar Tabrizi, pp. 48, 82; Rowhani, pp. 471–472; Masali, *Jonbesh chap-e Iran*, pp. 130–131; M. Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p.

66; H. Masali, Natayej-e seminar-e Wiesbaden dar bareh-ye jonbesh-e chap-e Iran, Frankfurt: Komiteh bargozar konandeh seminar-e Wiesbaden, October 1985, pp. 55–57.

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Ettela'at, 29 Ordibehesht 1355.

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<http://asre-nou.net/php/view.php?objnr=10399>

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(retrieved 9 July 2019). This report also refers to a fourth liquidation, 'Abdollah ('Abdolali) Panjehshahi, which occurred in 1977; see Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 817–820.

43

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Arash, no. 78, pp. 32–33, interview with Heydar. In the same issue of Arash, p. 39, Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour claims knowledge of an execution after 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari seeks the opinion of the guerrillas. He does not know the name of the liquidated Fada'i, but from his description, the person in question seems to be "Asad". For cases involving Fada'i members turning themselves in to the police, being released, and not being liquidated by the Fada'is, see: <http://www.iranian-fedaii.de/2010/Jul/12%20Jul/aksariyat.html>

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(retrieved 26 June 2019).

[44](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2727, NB PO13/1, “Iran: Internal Affairs”, 6 December 1976.

[45](#)

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Ettela‘at, 26 Farvardin, 8 Tir 1354.

[46](#)

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Information in this paragraph and the next relies entirely on Asghar Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 251–258.

[47](#)

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Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 259–261.

[48](#)

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Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 254.

[49](#)

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Arash, no. 79, interview with Heydar, p. 31.

[50](#)

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Ettela'at, 30 Farvardin, 3 Ordibehesht 1351.

[51](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, Khordad 1355, no. 7, pp. 103–109.

[52](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, Khordad 1355, no. 7, pp. 64–67.

[53](#)

•

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2496, NBP 1/1, “Political situation in Iran”, 14 August 1975.

[54](#)

•

Masali, Natayej-e seminar-e Wiesbaden dar bareh-ye jonbesh-e chap-e Iran, pp. 52–53.

[55](#)

▪

Ettelaʿat, 1 Khordad 1355.

[56](#)

▪

Masali, Natayej-e seminar-e Weisbaden dar bareh-ye jonbesh-e chap-e Iran, p. 55.

[57](#)

▪

Qaneʿifard, pp. 286–287.

[58](#)

▪

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2727, NB PO13/1, “Iran: Internal Affairs”, 1 July 1976.

[59](#)

▪

V. Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB: My Life in Soviet Espionage*, New York: Ivy Books, 1990, p. 199.

[60](#)

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Kuzichkin, pp. 199–200.

[61](#)

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Kuzichkin, pp. 200–201.

[62](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, *Khordad* 1355, pp. 185–187.

[63](#)

•

Information in this paragraph is based on Heydar Tabrizi, pp. 34–36.

[64](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 30 Farvardin 1354.

[65](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 180.

[66](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 181.

[67](#)

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Hasanpour, pp. 180–183, 186.

[68](#)

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Hasanpour, p. 182. Based on the confessions made by Bahman Naderipour (Tehrani) after his arrest. For Sabeti's account of the events, see Qane'ifard, pp. 255–257.

[69](#)

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'Alikhani, vol. 5, p. 69.

[70](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Chap dar Iran, vol. 8, p. 54.

[71](#)

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FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 120.

[72](#)

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FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 121.

[73](#)

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FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 146.

[74](#)

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Ettela‘at, 31 Ordibehesht 1354.

[75](#)

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New York Times, 22 May 1975; FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 128.

[76](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2727, NB PO13/1, “Iran: Internal Affairs”, 20 May 1976.

[77](#)

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Information in this paragraph is based on Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 261–266; Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 645–649; Faslnameh-ye motale‘at-e tarikhi, shomareh 57, vol. 1, Tabestan 1396, pp. 124–140.

[78](#)

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Naderi, vol. 1, pp. 651–653.

[79](#)

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Information in this paragraph is based on Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 263–264.

[80](#)

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Information in this paragraph is based on Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 273–274.

[81](#)

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Ettela‘at, 27, 28, 29 Ordibehesht 1355.

[82](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 6, p. 113.

[83](#)

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Asghar Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 268–270. Jilou’s article is an excellent, in-depth, and thoroughly researched study of the events leading to the death of Hamid Ashraf; Tabrizi in *Jongi dar bareh-ye zendegi va asar-e Bijan Jazani*, p. 255; Naderi, p. 656.

[84](#)

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Ettela‘at, 8, 9, 10 Tir 2535 (1355); Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 277–280.

[85](#)

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Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 275–276.

[86](#)

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<http://www.iran-nabard.com/40%20sal/shohada.htm>

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(retrieved 1 July 2019).

[87](#)

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Jilou, in Fathi and Khaliq, pp. 293–294.

[88](#)

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Marziyeh Shafi', "Tarikh qevazat khahad kard", in Bepish,
<https://bepish.org/node/2178>

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(retrieved 24 July 2019).

[89](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2727, NB PO13/1, "Iran: Internal Affairs", 1 July 1976.

[90](#)

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Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour, "Sazman az 1353 ta 1357", BBC,
http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2011/02/110206_113_siahkal_ghorbanali_rahim

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(retrieved 10 August 2019). Hereafter: 'Abdolrahimpour, BBC.

[91](#)

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'Abdolrahimpour, BBC.

[92](#)

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Ettela'at, 14 Farvardin 1356, 13 Tir 1356.

Guerrillas Conducting the Regime's Requiem

In May/June 1976, the Fada'i guerrillas called on the people to stand up for their rights, and engage in protests, demonstrations, and strikes. They called on workers, peasants, students, and members of the bazaar to join in protest movements. Reasserting their hope that armed struggle would become generalized and public, the guerrillas postulated that struggle began at lower levels of protest then gradually escalated to more elevated forms.¹

The news of Siyahkal and other guerrilla activities had galvanized university students at home and abroad. They acted as if an invisible conductor was leading a full orchestra with musicians in two different parts of the world, each playing a different set of musical instruments. Despite the haggling among players abroad, at the end of the day, the two geographically separate parts played the regime's political requiem in perfect harmony and coordination. Without the armed struggle movement acting as the maestro and revered by each group of musicians, the successful performance of the concerto would have been unlikely. In 1971, the Iranian student movement both at home and abroad needed a greater cause to identify with, directing it to a more defiant and combative path.

Without any formal agreement, the Iranian student movement, at home and abroad, became a natural political auxiliary branch of the guerrilla movement. At home, the student movement acted as the centre for propagating information about armed resistance. Iranian universities became de facto recruitment centres for the guerrillas and the hub for distributing pamphlets, treatises, and

declarations of the guerrilla movement, both Marxist and Islamic. The student movement defended, promoted, and explained the ideology and operations of the guerrillas against the regime, opening an important second front against it.

The students' regular protests, demonstrations, and at times destruction of property systematically harassed and exasperated the regime. The cycle of confrontations and repression became endemic. The politicized atmosphere in Iranian universities and the students' active support for "terrorists" and "saboteurs" became an open wound for the Shah. The country's future professionals, technocrats, bureaucrats, and politicians were becoming defiant, and no longer pledging loyalty to the Shah. The Shah could neither forget nor forgive such "treason".

Incapable of politically appeasing the university students, the Shah complained frequently to 'Alam that Iranian students "have everything", yet they "are in cahoots with the adventurists and terrorists".²

•

For the Shah, the recalcitrant mood of universities, especially after Siyahkal, was a constant reminder that a good number of Iran's intellectuals, artists, and academic elite were fundamentally opposed to his politics. The more the Shah was convinced of the wisdom of his policies, the more he moved along the road of autocracy, and the wider became the political gap between him and the students.

Iranian students abroad played a completely different, yet equally subversive role. Taking full advantage of democratic freedoms afforded to them in host countries, the Iranian student movement abroad acted as the propaganda machine, legal defence, and public relations branch of the armed struggle movement in Iran. It kept a sharp eye on the human rights condition of political prisoners in Iran, and lobbied energetically international organizations, human rights organizations, politicians, and most importantly journalists and newspapers. To highlight the plight of Iranian political prisoners, the students occupied Iranian government buildings and consulates in host countries. They played a decisive role in mobilizing public opinion in the West against the Shah's regime.

The political activities of Iranian students abroad included publications, organization of publicity campaigns, hunger strikes, collecting petitions, and

organizing demonstrations and occupations. These played a major role in putting pressure on the Shah's regime. From 1968, the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS) had taken up the cause of the Jazani Group. They had succeeded in sending three foreign legal observers to the trials which had begun in Tehran on 30 December 1968. The Association of Democratic Jurists, Amnesty International, and a Labour Party member of the British Parliament attended the trials.³

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After the August 1972 arrest of Mojahedin members, CIS was contacted by an attorney for the prisoners. The Confederation launched "a defence campaign and two observers from the International Federation of Human Rights were sent to Iran".⁴

•

On 27 August 1972, the public trial of Mehdi Reza'i, a member of the Mojahedin, opened in Tehran. Commenting on the trial, 'Alam observed that in the past such trials were conducted behind closed doors but, because of the fuss kicked up by Amnesty International and the foreign press, the regime had decided to open them to the public. With a note of sarcasm, 'Alam added, "Previously we would be slandered for conducting closed door trials, and now we will be publicly slandered by the defendants." After the trial, 'Alam remarked that the upshot of having allowed journalists, photographers, and television cameras into the courtroom was that the BBC correspondent branded it a show trial. The public trial turned Iran into the laughing stock of foreigners. The BBC report had enraged the Shah to such an extent that even 'Alam was startled by his outburst.⁵

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Students at home beat on the drums of war

Iranian universities were no strangers to unrest and anti-regime activities. The

slaying of three Iranian students at Tehran University during Vice-President Richard Nixon's visit on 16 Azar 1332 (7 December 1953) was commemorated annually by a day or two of student unrest. Various events, such as the death of Iran's legendary wrestling champion, Gholam-Reza Takhti, on 7 January 1968, the hike of bus fares on 22 February 1970, or general frustration and pent-up anger with the Shah's policies on 3 December 1970, led to more serious student unrest. Student protests during such occasions involved demonstrations, marches, chanting of anti-regime slogans, disruption of classes, and sometimes destruction of property (some 140 buses). At times, students would hurl stones at the military, usually resulting in widespread arrests, followed by further student demonstrations.

Incidents of student disturbance could last over a month and lead to a few days of closure at particularly restless universities or faculties (departments), but in time, they usually subsided. Highly sensitive to student unrest, SAVAK had formed a special committee to scrutinize student strife, investigate dissidents, and follow up on subversive student activities. In late September 1970, at the start of the new academic year, this special committee was constituted at Evin prison.⁶

•

The assault on Siyahkal, execution of the guerrillas, and subsequently, the guerrillas' armed operations during the Iranian month of Farvardin (21 March 1971 – 20 April 1971) had inflamed and emboldened the student movement. The post-Siyahkal blueprint for struggle was markedly different from the pre-Siyahkal period. Even students who did not choose to join the guerrillas looked up to them. The guerrilla movement gave them heart and a solid reason to manifest their defiance. Siyahkal and the guerrilla movement had spawned a political environment of rebellion and mutiny among Iranian students.

From March 1971, in solidarity with the Fada'i guerrillas, the university students celebrated their military campaigns against the regime, objected to their trials, and forcefully protested their execution or long prison sentences. From April 1971, police and SAVAK began carrying out numerous raids in the university milieus. After the Siyahkal assault, students in Iranian universities had cheered with the provocative chant, "Combatants of the forest, we are all in solidarity with you." A member of one of the first student circles, who joined the Fada'is after Siyahkal, recalled that radical university students began seeking contacts with the Fada'is and felt obliged to take the place of fallen guerrillas.⁷

▪

Once Hamid Ashraf's identity was revealed, and his central role in Siyahkal was established, SAVAK rounded up suspects to find possible associates. On 27 March 1971, three students from Tehran University's Engineering Faculty, Ashraf's alma mater, were rounded up by SAVAK and charged with involvement in the Siyahkal strike. The arrests triggered a serious backlash. Demonstrating students chanted slogans against the Shah, the Shah's White Revolution, and the celebrations commemorating 2,500 years of monarchy.

Three days after General Farsiyou succumbed to his wounds and died, some seven hundred students gathered at Tehran University, chanting hostile slogans against the regime, and distributing leaflets praising the assassination. The police, armed with riot-clubs, sub-machine guns, and gas masks, entered the campus to confront them. The clashes on 14 April 1971 resulted in "about 250 students" being arrested and "an equal number injured, several of them seriously".⁸

▪

On 27 and 29 April, students at Tehran University's faculties of science, law, and literature demonstrated inside the campus against student arrests in March and chanted slogans against the Shah and the White revolution.⁹

▪

Ariyamehr University of Technology had been founded in October 1965 under the Shah's direct auspices and it had become Iran's M.I.T. The Shah had very high hopes for its students, who were supposed to be Iran's future scientists, professionals, and technocrats. On Saturday, 1 May 1971, some five hundred students demonstrated at Ariyamehr University of Technology, culminating in intense skirmishes between students and the police. Riot police confronted the students, arrested some four hundred, and injured an unknown number, including a faculty member.¹⁰

▪

The American Ambassador in Iran, Douglas MacArthur, reported that "sizable student strikes erupted at both Tehran and Ariyamehr Universities." The police used "fairly rough tactics" and made "a large number of temporary arrests", injuring numerous students and even faculty members. The student unrest during the week of 3–10 May 1971 "exceeded the student-police confrontation of 1968, in terms of both severity and numbers".¹¹

▪

Concurrently, there was a much bigger demonstration at the entrance of Tehran University, following the 27 and 29 April protests. The students demanded the release of their arrested colleagues. The slogans and banners brandished included “The White Revolution is a hoax,” “Down with the Shah,” “Down with the 2,500th anniversary,” and, most importantly, “Hurray for General Farsiyou’s death,” and “Long live the killers of General Farsiyou.” After the riot police were sent in, “some very violent scenes ensued.” According to C.D.S. Drace-Francis, of the British Embassy in Iran, the students at the Ariyamehr University of Technology were mainly protesting against the “extravagance of the 2,500th anniversary celebrations”, while the students at Tehran University were demonstrating “in praise of the death of General Farsiyou and the Siahkal terrorists”. The events of 1 May snowballed, drawing the militant students at Tehran’s Polytechnic University into a brawl with the police. “Half of the Polytechnic came out in sympathy with Tehran University students, and also, in protest against the execution of the 13 members of Siahkal.”¹²

▪

The main campuses in Tehran were coming out in force in support of Siyahkal and armed struggle.

In an announcement made by Tehran University, the public was informed that as of 1 May 1971, the police had been instructed to enter the university campus to enforce law and order. The authorities threatened troublemakers with expulsion and announced that Tehran University’s Faculty of Engineering would be closed for three days.¹³

▪

The first and immediate impact of Siyahkal had been the unprecedented stationing of security forces on the campus of Iranian universities. The iron-fisted reaction of the regime to the university students merely reinforced their bond of brotherhood with the guerrilla movement and made them conscious of the danger which their combined strength posed for the regime.

In the eyes of the US Embassy in Iran, three features of the post-Siyahkal student demonstrations were worrisome: the larger than usual number of demonstrators, their increased radicalism and violence, and their provocative and inflammatory slogans. What prompted the regime to send in the police to university campuses were “the slogans and leaflets praising the assassination of

General Farsiyou".¹⁴

▪

▪

University turmoil and campus guards

The seditious turn in the student movement convinced the regime to forcefully quell further disturbances. The students were out to disobey, defy, and undermine the power of the regime in any manner possible. Stationing security and police units, called University Guards, on campuses almost militarized the universities. Systematic intimidation and often arbitrary arrest of students added to the environment of suspicion, anger, and violence, politicizing apolitical students.¹⁵

▪

The post-Siyahkal student unrest demonstrated some specific features. Disturbances and protests fanned out from one university to the next at spectacular speed. The same rule applied to the spread of unrest from Tehran universities to universities in Tabriz, Mashhad, Esfahan, Ahvaz, and Shiraz. Demonstrations displayed greater tenacity and endurance, lasting much longer than before. During student gatherings and strikes, non-political and welfare-related requests turned quickly into political demands. Universities became a hub for posting subversive political notices and distributing guerrilla-related literature. The disruption of classes and normal academic activities became more prevalent, with students using every opportunity to protest and riot. Finally, the violence employed, both by students and the regime, intensified and escalated.¹⁶

▪

The Ramsar Conference, in the summer of 1971, was devoted to the assessment of the Shah's Educational Revolution (enqelab-e amouzeshi). An essential item on its agenda, however, was to find a solution to student unrest, its association with guerrilla activities, and maintenance of order on university campuses. The main headline of Ettela'at, reporting on this important conference, read:

“Activities of saboteurs will no longer be tolerated in universities, not even for a second.” The gathering was chaired by the Shah, and its final statement was issued on 23 June 1971. It stipulated that the maintenance of peace and security at universities was a sacred responsibility, and that counter-revolutionary and anti-patriotic acts could no longer be permitted. New regulations concerning the maintenance of peace and security on university campuses were to be drafted. The Ramsar Conference officialized the role of the University Guards stationed on university campuses. It was to act without leniency or clemency.¹⁷

▪

During the last three weeks of the Iranian year 1350, university students reacted again with anger to the regime’s treatment of the guerrillas. On 1 March 1972, the press announced that six prisoners had been executed. These were Mas’oud Ahmadzadeh and his brother Majid, ‘Abbas Meftahi and his brother Asadollah, Hamid Tavakoli, and Gholamreza Galavi. Anticipating violent reactions at Mashhad University, where four of the six executed Fada’i prisoners had studied, the university closed on 6 March. On the afternoon of 7 March 1972, the students of Tehran University’s Faculty of Engineering began an on-campus demonstration. By the morning of 8 March, the number of protesting students had reached six hundred. Police were called in, and according to the American Embassy in Iran, there resulted “much manhandling of students”. Ariyamehr University of Technology and Tehran’s Polytechnic University followed suit in solidarity strikes.¹⁸

▪

Tension between university students and the authorities continued to rise during the year 1351 (21 March 1972 – 20 March 1973). Four days after the deaths of the Fada’is Pouyan, Sadeqinejad, and Pirounaziri were made public, and right before the arrival of President Nixon on an official state visit, unrest erupted again at Tehran University’s Faculty of Engineering. ‘Alam reported that the Shah had ordered a firm and severe response to the disturbances, short of closing down the Faculty.¹⁹

▪

On Nixon’s way back to the US, on 31 May 1972, as his motorcade passed by Tehran University’s main dormitory, it was pelted with stones.²⁰

▪

In a report on the “domestic political assessment of Iran”, dated 9 January 1973,

Joseph Farland, the American Ambassador to Iran, lumped together “students and terrorists” under one rubric, noting that “perhaps the group most thoroughly opposed to the Shah and his regime are students, inside and outside Iran, and the terrorists for whom they provide a fertile field for recruitment.” Farland estimated that the students and terrorists were “irritants at home and an embarrassment abroad”. According to Farland, “the students’ one real success” was “to influence international opinion in their favour”.²¹

▪

On 11 January 1973, the press reported on the execution of Mohammad Mofidi and Mohammad-Baqer ‘Abbasi, two members of the Mojahedin, who had been implicated in the assassination of Brigadier General Taheri.²²

▪

Two days later, when the press began publishing their confessions prior to their execution, Iranian universities were once again in the throes of turmoil.²³

▪

The faculties of engineering, sciences, law, literature, and pharmaceutical sciences of Tehran University participated in demonstrations which lasted some ten days. Students clashed with the police, hurling chairs, defiling the Shah’s statue, and setting fire to a car. They chanted, “We do not want a white revolution, we want a red revolution.” The new wave of student unrest was in support of armed struggle and against the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Shah’s White Revolution. During these demonstrations Tehran University was closed and many were arrested and injured.²⁴

▪

In solidarity with students at Tehran University, the students at Tehran’s Polytechnic University demonstrated against the regime’s arms purchases from the US and UK, and marched on the office of Israel’s El Al airline, smashing its windows. There were reports of clashes at National University of Tehran and the Ariyamehr University of Technology, where students chanted “Death to the Shah.” Some two hundred students were arrested. On 20 February 1973, clashes at Tehran University resumed with some one hundred students injured and arrested. Confrontations between demonstrating students and the joint forces of the military and police in Tehran, Esfahan, Ahvaz, and Tabriz turned out to be bloody. There were reports of students being beaten up with rifle butts, and injured or even killed by gunshots.²⁵

▪

On 19 March 1973, Farland, the US Ambassador in Iran, reported to the State Department on the “continuing widespread student unrest in Iran”. He spoke of three weeks of demonstrations across Iran, sometimes accompanied by violence on the part of students, and affecting “virtually every major college, university or technical training school in the country”. The widespread anti-regime activities and riots, he reported, “resulted in the closure, to one degree or another, of nearly all of Iran’s major centres of education”. According to Farland, the demonstration at Ariyamehr University of Technology, resulting in the arrest of thirty students, was “reputedly to mark [the] anniversary of [the] Siakal incident”. This demonstration then spread to Tehran University’s Faculty of Science. At Tabriz University, Farland reported, some two hundred students had been injured. He also referred to unconfirmed accounts from Tabriz University, putting the number of dead students between three and eleven. Farland concluded that the scope and continuity of the demonstrations revealed “the depth of anti-regime feeling among the students”, irrespective of the dire consequences of their acts.²⁶

▪

On 30 April 1973, with the first sign of a new wave of discontent at Tehran’s Polytechnic University, one of the main hubs of turmoil, the University Guards acted with unprecedented severity. Students were insulted and badly beaten up as they left classes. It was reported that the commander of the guards had ordered his troops to beat the students to death. Professors who tried to prevent the blind thrashing of the students were themselves subjected to the same treatment.²⁷

▪

‘Alam, the Minister of Court, reported that the order to deal harshly with the students had come directly from the Shah.²⁸

▪

The news of the assault spread quickly to other universities, leading to wider clashes and the annulment of the entire spring term in a number of universities.²⁹

▪

▪

Policy of zero tolerance

Having been given full powers by the Shah, in May 1973 SAVAK adopted a policy of zero tolerance in all domains. This policy was tantamount to exercising maximum repression against all who were suspected of having an affinity with the armed struggle movement. The fact that students at Tehran's Polytechnic University were reproducing declarations of the People's Fada'i Guerrillas on campus was a case in point of the unspoken collusion between politicized university students and the guerrilla movement.³⁰

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In the summer of 1973, there were reports of two attacks on Tehran University by the security forces. During the first attack by SAVAK, some thirty students were arrested, and during the second, which occurred at night in the Amirabad dormitory, some four hundred students were rounded up, two hundred of whom were released shortly afterwards. On 26 June 1973, pamphlets were distributed at Tehran University, eulogizing the executed members of the Mojahedin, including Reza Reza'i.³¹

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A new wave of demonstrations and protests erupted at Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering on 3 November 1973.³²

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On 27 November, demonstrations against the regime were reported at Tehran University's Faculty of Agriculture. The news of student unrest once again angered the Shah.³³

-

Within two weeks, strife spread to Tabriz, Mashhad, Esfahan, Ahvaz, National University of Tehran, Tehran's Polytechnic University, and Tehran University. Flustered by the scope and resilience of the stirrings, the Shah soothed himself by arguing that students were taking their cue from Moscow. Convinced that heavy-handed policies would crush the student movement, the Shah threatened the chancellors of all universities that he would not excuse "negligence and leniency" in confronting the students.³⁴

-

His reaction was comparable to the threats he made against his top brass when they failed to rapidly hunt down the Siyahkal assailants.

Yet, from the last few days of November 1973, another round of student unrest swept across Iranian universities. The demonstrations led to the closure of Tehran's Polytechnic University for at least ten days, and of two faculties at Tehran University.³⁵

•

On 17 December 1973, some two hundred students started a demonstration from Tehran's Polytechnic University, then marched towards Ariyamehr University of Technology.³⁶

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While the cat and mouse game between police and students continued, the Shah expressed his anger by calling the protesting students "deviant mercenaries".³⁷

•

•

The student backlash to the Golesorkhi affair

The execution of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan was never officially announced. News of their sentencing and rumours of their execution set off another round of angry protests and demonstrations in universities and high schools, leading to the military occupation and closure of Tehran University.³⁸

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From 22 February 1974, three days after the execution of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan, student unrest began at Esfahan University and spread to Tabriz and Tehran University.³⁹

•

The defiance and boldness of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan had awakened a sense

of moral obligation to rebel against injustice among social groups which had previously been silent bystanders. Among the security services, any sign of support for Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan was viewed as an indication of sympathy for armed struggle. Their sensitivity reached such a frenzy that eight students at the National University of Tehran were arrested on the charge of wearing red roses in the buttonhole of their jackets. The practice of wearing red roses and chanting slogans in favour of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan spread to Tehran University.⁴⁰

▪

Disturbances at universities across Iran occurred in the footsteps of the new academic term of October 1974. As more regional institutions of higher education opened their doors to students, the incidence of disruptions increased. Once again, rebelliousness among students became a major concern of the Shah in his discussions with his Minister of Court between 1974 and 1975. The Shah was ever more convinced that dissident and militant students were the same as saboteurs (kharabkar), guerrillas, and terrorists.⁴¹

▪

Between December 1974 and January 1975, seeking retribution against the student movement, the Shah ordered thugs from the Iran-e Novin Party (New Iran Party), Iran's ruling party at the time, to enter the university and thrash the students. The chancellor of Tehran University, Houshang Nahavandi, was caught off guard since he had not been informed in advance of the Shah's decision.⁴²

▪

The academic year of 1974–1975 was marked by regular strikes and shutdowns, as students in “almost every university” protested “the arrest of political prisoners”. The academic year was “virtually lost”.⁴³

▪

The Shah's decision on 2 March 1975 to put an end to any semblance of a multiparty system by announcing the birth of the single Rastakhiz Party (Resurgence Party) added to the agitation and disgruntlement of students. Protesting the Shah's increasingly arbitrary rule, students at Tehran University and Ariyamehr University of Technology refused to attend classes and embarked on damaging property. The Shah, in turn, expressed his anger by again calling student activists “deviationist mercenaries”, manipulated by and in the pay of foreigners.⁴⁴

▪

By June 1975, the Shah had become convinced that Iranian universities were but safe houses of “treacherous red agents and black reactionaries”.⁴⁵

▪

During some four years, a large number of Iranian university students had engaged in an escalating spiral of hostilities with the regime. Neither side was prepared to back off, and short of opening fire on the students, the regime did not know what to do with them. The two sides were heading for a showdown.

According to Anthony Parsons, 1975 proved to be the “worst academic year for a long time”. The students went on strikes, demonstrated, and smashed windows. To Parsons, the most disconcerting news was the confirmed “link between the general discontent of the Iranian intelligentsia and those who had translated their discontent into violent activity”. Reflecting on the student scene of 1975, Parsons worried about the increasing alienation process of non-politicized Iranian students and its consequences. He wrote that the principal contact of “perfectly ordinary, middle of the road students is with SAVAK and the police, with baton charges, beatings-up and mass arrest”.⁴⁶

▪

It was not, therefore, surprising that the non-politicized became antagonized and radicalized.

As student unrest continued, the Shah was enraged that SAVAK and the National Police could not identify the student saboteurs. The Shah instructed ‘Alam to meet with SAVAK and the security authorities, and to present him with a report on what was being done to find the culprits.⁴⁷

▪

By April 1976, after ‘Alam reported on unrest among university students at Babolsar, the Shah finally admitted that “in the end, we have been incapable of managing these universities.”⁴⁸

▪

A month later, the Shah received reports of students demonstrating in support of “the terrorists”. He initially ordered the closure of Tehran Polytechnic University and Tehran University’s Engineering Faculty.⁴⁹

▪

According to a member of the Fada'is, the surge in the number of guerrilla sympathizers among university students, in addition to the released political prisoners joining the guerrillas during 1974 and 1975, had turned the Fada'i Organization into a powerful and robust guerrilla organization.⁵⁰

▪

During the academic year 1976–1977, a different kind of “guerrilla force”, namely student sympathizers of the guerrillas, stepped up activities in Iranian universities. It is reported that, between 1976 and 1977, the upsurge in the number of student sympathizers of the guerrillas was unprecedented. These students spread throughout universities, led strikes, and disseminated anti-regime information. At this point, the number of student sympathizers of the guerrilla movement had outstripped by far the number of organizational members.⁵¹

▪

In May 1976, SAVAK reported that university students had disrupted classes, chanted slogans in favour of the “emancipated martyrs”, and openly mourned the death of Fada'i guerrillas killed in gun battles. Furious when informed of the university students' open pledge of allegiance to the guerrilla movement, the Shah seriously considered closing Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering, Tehran's Polytechnic University, and the School of Science and Industry (‘elm-o-san‘at).⁵²

▪

Throughout the academic year 1976–1977, Tehran University, Ariyamehr University of Technology, and Tehran's Polytechnic University, as well as colleges such as the College of Translation in Tehran, and provincial universities such as those in Azarbayjan, Baluchestan, and Mashhad were either closed periodically or were the scenes of rioting. Students marched around the campus, rioting, shouting slogans, and throwing stones. In the main building of Ariyamehr University of Technology, “there was hardly a window left unbroken.”⁵³

▪

▪

Winds of change

On 23 September 1977, the Shah and the Queen, accompanied by the new Prime Minister, Jamshid Amouzegar, attended the traditional opening ceremony of Tehran University for the academic year 1977–1978. What occurred during this opening session heralded some change in the regime’s approach to the students. Concerned with Jimmy Carter’s imminent entrance into the White House, and pressure from Western allies on issues of human rights violations, the Shah was retreating from his policy of zero tolerance.

What seemed like an Iranian glasnost was not free of old phantoms. The official line continued to argue that student discontent, whether domestic or abroad, was commandeered by foreigners. The critical item signalling a revision of the regime’s stance towards university students was that the students were allowed to publicly demand the removal of the campus guard. Five years after the occupation of Iranian universities and installation of the University Guards, the regime was indirectly acknowledging the failure of its policy of zero tolerance.

The press reported that “debate and criticism”, “the unrestrained expression of objections and airing problems”, and “political dialogue at universities” had been discussed in the presence of the King and the Queen.⁵⁴

▪

This was certainly a novelty. The four student representatives speaking on this occasion showered the Shah with the usual praises and emphasized that the disruptive students were foreign agents. However, their report on the state of Tehran University was candid. The student representatives who had been hand-picked to speak in the presence of the Shah spoke about cancelled classes due to strikes, students distributing samizdat literature, and breaking doors, windows, chairs, and tables on campus. The student representatives confirmed the existence of insecurity at Tehran University, but they insisted on the importance of free expression of problems and objections. They also requested the removal of the University Guards, which they believed would help resolve the political problems of the university.

Less than three weeks later, another event tested the regime’s new policy of political openness and tolerance. Starting on 10 October 1977, some eight

thousand to twenty thousand people gathered for a ten-night poetry reading event at Goethe Institute. The crowd came from all walks of life, but the majority were “young intellectuals and university students”.⁵⁵

▪

P.J. Westmacott of the British Embassy in Tehran reported that the readings were attended by “serious, intense people listening to every word that was uttered by a variety of poets and writers”, and that “not once did the attendance drop below 5,000.” Westmacott quoted an Iranian lawyer who had characterized the poetry reading nights “as the most significant political event in Iran this decade”.⁵⁶

▪

The event’s attractive poster depicted a smiling little white fish against a red background calling out to the forest. All symbols of the guerrilla movement were conjured up to reach a different kind of “people’s army”. Bozorg Khazra’i, the artist of the famous poster, recalled that the red background symbolized feverishness and the revolution, and the colour of the little fish, suggested by Gholam-Hoseyn Sa’edi, represented purity and innocence. The message that the poster wished to convey, he recalled, was “war and battle”.⁵⁷

▪

To politicized Iranians, however, the poster evoked the two striking symbols of armed struggle, Behrangi’s little black fish, and the Siyahkal forests. The ten nights of poetry reading at Goethe Institute, the inception of the Iranian Revolution, traced its history and identity to the birth of the armed struggle movement.

The ten nights of poetry reading provided a special forum where poets and writers came together and engaged in an unprecedented criticism of the regime’s cultural policies. They condemned censorship, repression, and the fear which prevailed in society. Using “forbidden words” such as winter, red rose, jungle, and guerrillas, they spoke openly of prohibited books and authors. The speakers praised freedom, constitutional rights, the universal declaration of human rights and demanded the freedom of peers in prison. As the enthusiastic audience applauded the speakers’ invitation to rise together, military and police forces surrounding the Goethe Institute watched, but did not interfere. This event marked the beginning of a domino effect which culminated in the 1979 revolution.

Notes

[1](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 7, p. 88.

[2](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 5, pp. 47, 52.

[3](#)

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Mohajer and Baba-‘Ali, pp. 51–69; A. Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, California: Mazda, 2002, p. 105.

[4](#)

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Matin-Asgari, p. 132.

[5](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 2, pp. 286–288.

[6](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, Jebheh-ye melli, Tehran: Markaz-e barrasi-e asnad-e tarikhi-e vezarat-e ettela‘at, 1379, pp. 209–210, 218; Ettela‘at, 5, 6, 12 Esfand 1348; Khabarnameh-ye Jebheh-ye melli, shomareh chahardahom, Farvardin 1349; Sazman-e mojahedin-e khalq: peyda‘i ta farjam, vol. 1, pp. 425–426; Hasanpour, pp. 168–169; ‘Alikhani, vol. 2, pp. 120, 123, 135–136; ‘Abdi, p. 172.

[7](#)

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Arash, no. 79, interview with Heydar, p. 27.

[8](#)

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Information in the two paragraphs is based on Foreign Relations United States (FRUS), 1969–1976, vol. E-4, Iran–Iraq, document 126.

[9](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 17/1514, NEP 1/7, “Demonstrations by students in Iran”, 5 May 1971.

[10](#)

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‘Abdi, p. 168; FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 126.

[11](#)

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FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 126.

[12](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 17/1514, NEP 1/7, “Demonstrations by students in Iran”, 5 May 1971.

[13](#)

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Ettela‘at, 12 Ordibehesht 1350.

[14](#)

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FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 126.

[15](#)

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For an excellent first-hand account by students see ‘Abdi, pp. 172–173.

[16](#)

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ʿAbdi, pp. 208–219.

[17](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 3 Tir 1350.

[18](#)

▪

Information in this paragraph is based on FRUS, 1969–1976, vol. E-4, document 174.

[19](#)

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ʿAlikhani, vol. 2, p. 255.

[20](#)

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ʿAlikhani, vol. 2, p. 259.

[21](#)

▪

FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 1.

[22](#)

▪

Ettela‘at, 21 Dey 1351.

[23](#)

▪

‘Alikhani, vol. 2, p. 390; Ettela‘at, 2 Bahman 1351.

[24](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 36, Farvardin 1352.

[25](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 36, Farvardin 1352.

[26](#)

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FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 11.

[27](#)

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‘Abdi, p. 214.

[28](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 3, p. 35.

[29](#)

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‘Abdi, pp. 172, 214.

[30](#)

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‘Abdi, p. 190.

[31](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 48, nimeh dovom Aban 1352.

[32](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 48, nimeh dovom Aban 1352.

[33](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 3, pp. 302–305.

[34](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 3, pp. 319, 321.

[35](#)

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FRUS, 1973–1976, vol. XXVII, document 47.

[36](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 3, p. 331.

[37](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 3, p. 370.

[38](#)

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‘Abdi, p. 218; Peyman, no. 55, March 1975, as quoted in Matin-Asgari, p. 142.

[39](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 55, Tir 1353.

[40](#)

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Bakhtar-e Emrooz, shomareh 54, Khordad 1353 and 55, Tir 1353.

[41](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 4, p. 267 and vol. 5, p. 52.

[42](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 4, pp. 265, 310–311.

[43](#)

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The Economist, 8 March 1975.

[44](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 3, pp. 319, 370.

[45](#)

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Ettelaʿat, 17 Khordad 1354.

[46](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2496, NBP 1/1, “Political situation in Iran, 1975”, 14 August 1975, and FCO 8/2497, NBP 1/3, “Annual Review for Iran, 1975”, 15 December 1975.

[47](#)

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ʿAlikhani, vol. 4, p. 267.

[48](#)

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ʿAlikhani, vol. 6, p. 83.

[49](#)

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ʿAlikhani, vol. 6, pp. 115, 122–123.

[50](#)

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Behrooz Khaliq in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 370.

[51](#)

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Behrooz Khaliq in Fathi and Khaliq, p. 371.

[52](#)

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‘Alikhani, vol. 6, pp. 115, 122.

[53](#)

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Information in this paragraph is based on: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2980, NBP 013/1, “Iran Internal Political Affairs, 1977”, 23 February 1977.

[54](#)

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Ettela‘at, 2 Mehr 1356.

[55](#)

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M-H. Khosropanah, Shabha-ye nevisandegan va sha‘eran-e Iran, Tehran: Nashr-e payam-e emrooz, 1396, pp. 38–39.

[56](#)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO 8/2980, NBP 013/1, “Iran: Internal Political Affairs, 1977”, 25 October 1977.

[57](#)

▪

Khosropanah, pp. 30–31.

The Regime's Requiem: The Players Abroad

On 4 April 1971, when the Ranking Security Official presented his exposé on Siyahkal, he referred to the Confederation of Iranian Students National Union (CISNU) as an organization which received its orders from foreigners. CISNU had already been labelled illegal, and the Ranking Security Official asserted that its members were affiliated with foreign “secret services”, the agents of “black and red imperialism”.¹

For SAVAK and the Shah, activities of the Iranian students abroad were subversive. They were advocating for democratic freedoms, due process of law, free elections, and human rights in Iran. The student movement abroad was breathing in democracies and fighting against authoritarianism and repression in Iran. Even before the outburst of armed struggle in Iran, the regime had regarded CISNU as an organization of “terrorists” and “saboteurs”.

Before the news of Siyahkal, CISNU had been going through a slump, bogged down in abstract debates. The guerrilla movement in Iran changed the situation and the mood of members, energizing and revitalizing them. An old hand in student politics abroad characterized the guerrilla movement as the flame which set fire to the activities of CISNU.²

The armed struggle in Iran provided it with a focus and a tangible purpose. In turn, a majority of politicized students abroad became the propaganda arm of the

guerrilla movement.³

▪

The tempo of radicalization and protest after Siyahkal, both armed and unarmed, had resulted in the regime's disproportionate retaliation. Post-Siyahkal, two parallel campaigns were set into motion. First, society witnessed the outbreak of the urban armed struggle movement, involving military operations, gunfights, arrests, torture, closed military tribunals, harsh sentences, and executions. Second, an intense non-armed student movement, connected with and almost synchronized with the armed struggle movement, made its debut. This campaign involved student demonstrations and strikes, and clashes with the University Guards, police, and even the military. During confrontations, raids, and skirmishes, students were arrested, often tortured, detained, and then released or imprisoned for longer periods. The fallout of the intensified clampdown in post-Siyahkal Iran gave birth to a re-energized CISNU. Its revived activities set into motion a third movement working against the regime.

▪

Iranian students abroad rallying against the regime

To attain its objectives, CISNU relied on different levers. It informed, petitioned, and obtained the active involvement and support of international human rights and legal organizations. In various European and US cities, it organized campaigns, hunger strikes, demonstrations, marches, press conferences, and teach-ins to impact public opinion. It established close links with the Western press and informed them about the practices of the regime, and the predicament of political dissidents and activists. Finally, CISNU reached out to internationally known personalities, intellectuals, and artists, as well as Western lawmakers, to defend the human and political rights of Iranian activists and demand greater transparency and accountability from the Iranian regime.⁴

▪

About a month before the public announcement of the Siyahkal attack, CISNU, like all other politically conscious Iranian organizations, had been going through the soul-searching process of what position to take vis-à-vis the regime. An important internal debate revolved around whether the organization should remain faithful to the Iranian Constitution or call for the overthrow of the regime. The Iranian government had pronounced CISNU as illegal, and this weighed on the debates.

During the 12th Congress of 9–14 March 1971, a clear disagreement broke out between CISNU members. The old guard wished to maintain the organization as a heterogenous and open platform for all shades of student opposition. They were in favour of keeping the organization focused on student welfare issues, and free of complications which would result from the radicalization of the organization. They even looked favourably upon disbanding CISNU after the government ban. The radicalized young blood, on the other hand, were becoming convinced of the futility of peaceful methods of change in Iran.⁵

▪

From January 1971 to January 1974, CISNU considered itself to be “a part of the Iranian people’s democratic and anti-imperialist movement”. It called for “securing social and political rights and freedoms” for all Iranians. In its 1971 Charter, CISNU characterized itself as “an open, popular, democratic, and anti-imperialist organization”, open to “diverse ideas”. It declared that it was averse to expressing views or taking positions “on society’s fundamental problems which would involve ideological debates and taking up class positions”.⁶

▪

The 12th Congress of CISNU rejected all attempts at including references to Iran’s Constitution, as well as efforts at incorporating a clause demanding the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime.⁷

▪

CISNU was trying very hard to drive a middle-of-the-road course, more radical than the National Front’s traditional call to work strictly within the Constitution, and more conservative than the revolutionary Marxists who demanded the regime’s overthrow. Siyahkal had strengthened the hand of radical factions within CISNU who were lobbying to draw the student organization into the project of overthrowing the regime.

During the 13th Congress (8–12 January 1972), a new resolution was passed calling for the establishment of a new “Defensive Secretariat”. This body was charged with exposing the anti-democratic nature and “fascistic acts of the regime”, as well as defending Iranian political prisoners and the people’s struggle. Its briefs also included widespread propaganda on the condition of workers and toilers in Iran.⁸

▪

In the post-Siyahkal period, CISNU shifted into an offensive gear.

In January 1974, CISNU veered towards its radical constituency. A resolution passed during the 15th Congress of CISNU (2–11 January 1974) incorporated the opaque notion that “the overthrow of the despotic regime of Mohammad-Reza Shah and the expulsion of imperialists” were the “objective and historical demands” of Iran’s progressive classes, and that the opposition’s struggle reflected those demands.⁹

▪

It seemed as though instead of coming out and saying that the overthrow of the regime was CISNU’s objective, the Congress decided to call it the opposition’s objective. After a three-year-old identity crisis, CISNU was almost openly advocating regime change.

The wording of the resolution was, probably intentionally, convoluted to avoid alienating the more conservative factions. Nevertheless, CISNU stood closer than ever to the guerrillas and to the student movement in Iran, when it acknowledged that all progressive forces wished for the regime’s overthrow. The election of the three interim Secretaries during the 15th Congress demonstrated the mood and proclivity of CISNU members. Kambiz Rousti, Hormoz Samimi, and Jaber Kalibi were all three in favour of “defending the guerrilla struggle in Iran”.¹⁰

▪

▪

Iranian students abroad take their cue from the guerrillas

Seeking stronger ties with the guerrilla movements in Iran, the 15th Congress of CISNU welcomed the Mojahedin's warm message of solidarity. In a message symbolically dated 16 Azar 1352 (7 December 1973), the Islamic guerrillas called on CISNU to maintain their unity in the face of a common enemy, namely imperialism and the domestic reactionary forces led by the Shah. The message thanked CISNU for its efforts and wished it greater success in "performing their patriotic duties". The Mojahedin emphasized that, along with the Fada'i guerrillas, they too believed in armed struggle as the sole means of the people's liberation.

Most importantly, the Mojahedin identified several domains in which the student movement abroad could assist the armed struggle movement in Iran. They called on CISNU to expose the regime's atrocities through contacts with international organizations, and to sway public opinion against the Shah's regime. The Mojahedin called on CISNU to defend the cause of Iranian political prisoners, support their families, and propagate the ideas of the guerrillas by publicizing their heroic feats. Finally, they appealed to the members of CISNU to prepare themselves, and eventually join the theatre of war at home. The Mojahedin guerrillas thanked the student movement abroad for supporting the "just struggle of the people", and especially for their "endorsement (ta'id) of armed struggle".¹¹

▪

A year later, CISNU moved to fully align its objectives with those of the guerrilla movement. The 16th CISNU Congress (8–15 January 1975) adopted a new charter, finalizing its adherence to the overthrow of the regime.¹²

▪

This important moment reflected an alignment of objectives by the three main currents actively engaged against the regime, namely the guerrillas with the students inside and outside of Iran. The 16th Congress also heralded CISNU's recognition of the ethos of armed struggle as the only conceivable solution left to the regime's opposition. It was most telling that the 16th Congress began its deliberations by listening to two messages of solidarity sent by the Fada'i and Mojahedin guerrillas.¹³

▪

The Mojahedin's second message to CISNU was like a long and detailed report

of the three years they had devoted to armed struggle. The message thanked CISNU for its “brilliant activities” in support of the Iranian people’s armed struggle. It emphasized that the Mojahedin considered “entering into the path of armed struggle” as the prime responsibility of all “honest combatants”. With regard to the role of “comrades abroad”, the message reiterated that their principal responsibility was to support the armed movement, acting as a rear line support system for the armed organizations in the country. The Mojahedin called on CISNU to further increase its pressure on the regime by exposing its atrocities and sending international jurists to inspect Iranian prisons.¹⁴

▪

In their first short and undated message to CISNU, the Fada’i guerrillas thanked the Confederation for “its revolutionary and valuable activities” in support of the Iranian people’s struggles, and its “exposure of the ever more heinous visage of the Pahlavi regime”. The Fada’i guerrillas referred to “the Confederation” of students abroad as comrades-in-arms.¹⁵

▪

CISNU’s response to the Fada’is sounded like an apprentice addressing a mentor. It acknowledged how CISNU had learnt from the guerrillas the art of resistance, struggle, and persistence in overthrowing “reaction, imperialism and the Shah’s regime”. The students pledged to employ all means available to serve the “revolutionary movement”. They promised to publicize the combative voice of the Fada’i and the Mojahedin guerrillas, and to carefully follow their guidelines (rahnemoudha). In conclusion, CISNU promised to “keep hoisted the Fada’is’ brave flag of struggle”.¹⁶

▪

The expectations of the guerrilla movement in Iran from the students abroad were essentially the same as those articulated in the Mojahedin’s message to the 15th Congress. These suggestions would be later reiterated in the messages of the Fada’is to the 17th (January 1976) and 18th (January 1977) Congress of the Iranian students abroad. Heydar Tabrizi was Hamid Ashraf’s special envoy sent to negotiate with the Star Group. Tabrizi arrived in Germany right before the 17th Congress, which he attended incognito and where he met with Manouchehr Kalantari.¹⁷

▪

After the death of Hamid Ashraf and the disarray of the Fada’i Organization, all

contact was cut off between the organization's representatives abroad and the leadership inside Iran. To contest any talk of dismantlement of the Fada'is in Iran, Ashraf Dehqani, Mohammad Hormatipour, and Heydar Tabrizi, who were in Europe, wrote a message to the 18th Congress on behalf of the Fada'is. The previous two messages had been sent from the Fada'is in Iran through an envoy.¹⁸

▪

CISNU tore at the Shah's image in the West, turning Western public opinion against their own governments which supported the Shah's regime. The student movement abroad fulfilled its mission to "expose the Shah's regime".¹⁹

▪

CISNU's compelling efforts pushed a besieged and increasingly irritated Shah and SAVAK to the fragile point of paranoia and hysteria, where they suspected an international conspiracy at every corner.

The regime's iron-fisted policies, as well as SAVAK's blunders, facilitated the task of conducting a successful campaign against the regime's abuse of human rights. Iran's negative image was communicated by CISNU to the foreign media and the press who, in turn, relayed it to the Western public. The Shah's remarks to the foreign press did not serve his cause.²⁰

▪

Caught in a cold war mental trap, the Shah presented himself as a tough anti-communist bulwark. He proudly told the world that communists in his country were not considered political prisoners but common criminals, and that guerrilla fighters were terrorists and traitors to whom he would show no mercy.²¹

▪

His boastfulness about eliminating and executing terrorists and traitors could be construed as confessions of authoritarianism, arbitrary rule, and excess violence.

The well-coordinated campaign of the Western press, international organizations, legislators, jurists, intellectuals, and politicians against the abuse of human rights alarmed the Shah. Historically anxious about the power and reach of the West in his country, the Shah confused the discontent of Western civil society with the dissatisfaction of Western governments. The unfounded suspicion that the US and Europe, his most significant supporters and allies after the 1953 coup, were

plotting against him, unhinged him.

•

Radical methods to put the Shah's regime on the spot

CISNU's classical method of drawing Western public attention to violations of democratic and human rights in Iran was through organizing demonstrations and protest marches. More radical methods of getting press attention were acts of occupying and damaging Iranian government buildings abroad. Back in September 1961, Iranian students had occupied the Iranian Consulate General in Munich, until they were expelled from the grounds by the police.²²

•

Subsequently, the Iranian Embassy in Rome was occupied for a few hours, on 27 January 1969, followed by the Iranian Consulate General in Munich, on 5 August 1970. On 15 October 1971, protesting the Shah's lavish 2,500-year celebration of Iran's monarchical system, some 250 students demonstrated in front of the Iranian Consulate General in San Francisco. They subsequently blew up the Consulate General building with some 120 sticks of dynamite. The incident caused no injuries.²³

•

From 1961 to October 1971, there were three cases of occupations and one case of bombing against Iranian diplomatic missions in Europe and the US.

After the 15th Congress, CISNU's activities reflected a marked ratcheting-up in its anti-regime campaigns. Reacting to the sentences meted out during the January 1974 trial of Golesorkhi, Daneshiyan, and their co-defendants, CISNU went on a major offensive. Concurrent with a series of demonstrations and hunger strikes across Europe, on 8 March 1974, Iran's Embassies in Brussels, Stockholm, and The Hague were occupied by members of CISNU. News of the student occupations and, more importantly, of their political demands was given

coverage in the Western press.

Students occupying Iranian embassies in Europe denounced repression, arrests, torture, political executions, and Iran's interference in the internal affairs of Oman. In Stockholm, students chanted, "Shah, assassin", and demanded that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights investigate the condition of political prisoners in Iran. The police arrested sixteen masked students. In The Hague, demonstrators forced their way into the embassy, wrote slogans, and plastered the walls with posters of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan. The police arrested some twenty students. In Cologne, some two thousand students began a protest march towards Bonn.²⁴

▪

On a single day, 8 March 1974, CISNU had matched what it had been doing in ten years, in terms of occupying Iranian government buildings, and drawing attention to violations of human rights in Iran.

The 16th Congress of CISNU, in January 1975, led to a split. The majority in favour of calling for the regime's overthrow were known as the "combative tendency" (khatt-e razmandeh). The minority who were against a regime overthrow were known as the "right tendency" (khatt-e rast).²⁵

▪

The radical majority was intent on transforming the war against the regime in Iran to a war against the regime in Europe.²⁶

▪

Despite this split within CISNU, student campaigns intensified in their aim to undermine the prestige and authority of the Shah's regime.²⁷

▪

From May 1975 to December 1977, the Iranian student movement abroad rocked European capitals and major cities. They carried out four occupations of Iranian government buildings and staged numerous marches, demonstrations, and hunger strikes. They were also said to have been involved in a firebombing and an assassination attempt, both in Paris. The operations during this period were better coordinated, more violent, and more targeted, seeking maximum impact. The longer the students could stretch out the occupations, and even their own arrests, the longer they attracted media attention to their political demands, and

the situation in Iran.

The extrajudicial execution of the nine key political prisoners, including Jazani, Zia-Zarifi, Sourki, and Kalantari, on 18 April 1975 triggered a quick response. On 29 April 1975, twenty-one Iranian students occupied the Iranian Embassy in Kensington (London), where they protested the deaths of the nine political prisoners, as well as the ill treatment, torture, and killing of numerous other political prisoners. The students, charged with “conspiracy to trespass”, were jailed for nine days.²⁸

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The students followed up their campaign in May with hunger strikes and demonstrations in Vienna, Paris, and London.²⁹

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On 31 December 1975, the Iranian press released the news that ten new “saboteurs” had been condemned to death by a military tribunal.³⁰

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Protests erupted, followed by hunger strikes and demonstrations in Munich, West Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Paris, Strasbourg, Rome, London, and Montreal during the first two weeks of January 1976. Jean-Paul Sartre was a member of the Committee for the Defence of Iranian Political Prisoners. This committee issued a statement against the Shah’s “illegal methods of justice” and drew attention to violations of human rights in Iran and evidence of “state terrorism”.³¹

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The student protests escalated when the Iranian Consulate General in Bonn was occupied.³²

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On 29 January 1976, some twenty students occupied the Iranian Radio and Television building in Paris for some three hours. Two days later, on Saturday night, 31 January 1976, Molotov cocktails were hurled at the Iran Air building on the Champs-Élysées, causing damage but no casualties.³³

-

No arrests were made, but it was logical to suspect that the Iranian students had

stepped up the intensity of their operations.

The immediate reaction of French intellectuals, artists, and academics to the events in Iran was most telling. In a statement, high-profile and prominent figures such as Jean-Pierre Chevènement, Régis Debray, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Lionel Jospin, François Mitterrand, Vincent Monteil, Serge Reggiani, Paul Ricoeur, Simone Signoret, Yves Montand, Alain Touraine, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Louis Aragon referred to the guerrillas as “revolutionary anti-Fascists”. In *Le Monde* of 4 February 1976, they denounced the silence of the French government in the face of flagrant human rights violations in Iran.³⁴

▪

In the eyes of progressive French public figures, the guerrillas in Iran were not terrorists but freedom fighters engaged in the same type of combat as were the French guerrilla fighters battling against the occupation of Nazi Germany.

The documents retrieved by the students who occupied the Iranian Embassy in Bonn pointed to the Iranian Consulate General in Geneva as SAVAK’s secret headquarters in Europe.³⁵

▪

At 10:30 on Tuesday, 1 June 1976, fourteen students took over the Iranian Consulate General in Geneva. They detained the staff of the Consulate in one room, broke framed pictures of the Shah, and wrote anti-regime slogans on the walls. The students were evicted, and subsequently arrested after some four hours. In the meantime, a considerable number of sensitive and damning documents, demonstrating the extent of SAVAK’s presence, infiltration, and surveillance in Western countries, were seized by the students.

The Iranian students passed on the incriminating documents to the press, which subsequently published them, causing embarrassment for the Shah’s regime. For its part, the Swiss expelled Malek Mahdavi, an Iranian diplomat accredited to the United Nations in Geneva, and an alleged SAVAK operative.³⁶

▪

The expulsion of an Iranian diplomat, for involvement in “prohibited intelligence activities”, was humiliating. The fact that Iranian students abroad were at the origin of this crisis was even more exasperating for the Iranian

government.

Hamid Ashraf and his fellow fighters were gunned down in Tehran, on 29 June 1976. Some four months later, on the evening of 2 November 1976, Homayoun Keykavousi, an Iranian diplomat in Paris, was shot and severely wounded in front of his house. Keykavousi survived the gunshots to his chest and stomach. A policeman was also injured in the shoot-out. Three hours after the attempt on Keykavousi's life, a movement called Reza Reza'i International Brigade accepted responsibility for the attempted assassination. In a statement, it called Keykavousi the "representative of the Iranian Gestapo in France, namely SAVAK". Two Iranian students were arrested, and later released in this connection, while four Iranian students were expelled from France.³⁷

▪

Forty-eight hours after the assassination attempt, the French police arrested Nader Oskou'i and Mohammad-Reza Takbiri, members of CISNU, and suspected of involvement in the attack.

The arrest of two suspects and the expulsion from France of Kazem Kardavani, Firouz Sedarat, Robabeh Karim-Tahmasebi (Nader Oskou'i's wife), and Behrooz 'Arefi led to another round of widespread demonstrations in Europe.³⁸

▪

Iranian students condemned the detentions and voiced their grievances against the Shah's regime. Hunger strikes were held in Paris, and students demonstrated in front of the French Embassy in Stockholm. Iranian students organized demonstrations and hunger strikes in Germany and Italy, as well as in France, in the cities of Strasbourg and Grenoble. The large demonstrations in Houston (US) led to clashes with the police, and the arrest of a hundred students. Some thirty-five to fifty students were reported to have been injured.³⁹

▪

The attempt on Keykavousi's life, in November 1976, marked a real escalation in the tactics employed by the opposition abroad. Even though the Iranian students who had been accused and imprisoned were released, and their connection with the assassination attempt was never proven, the fact remained that the target was an Iranian diplomat who was said to have been the SAVAK station chief in Paris. It has been suggested that it was the documents retrieved at the Iranian Consulate in Geneva that led to the identification of Keykavousi.⁴⁰

•

The story behind the Keykavousi affair remains a mystery. It would be difficult not to imagine some sort of connection, irrespective of its nature, between the assassination attempt and the Iranian students abroad. Had the radical fringes of the Iranian student movement abroad called on the help of the German Red Army Faction, George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General command? The Fada'is had close relations with the Palestinian organizations led by Habash and Jibril. Yet the name of the brigade accepting responsibility for the assassination may indicate a relation between supporters of the Mojahedin and the hit on Keykavousi. As of November 1976, the Iranian regime found not only its buildings, but its secret service personnel exposed and in danger. The students had brought their war against the Iranian regime into Europe.

Notes

[1](#)

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Ettela'at, 15 Farvardin 1350.

[2](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, vol. 1, p. 192.

[3](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, vol. 1, pp. 193–194.

[4](#)

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For a judicious account of the details of the above fields see Matin-Asgari, pp. 87–89, 119–120, 122, 124, 129, 132–134, 136–137, 141–143. See also Pejvak, organ-e defa'i, shomareh 4 (foqol'adeh 3) Azar 1355; 'Ali Nadimi in Atabaki and Mohajer, vol. 2, pp. 507–509.

[5](#)

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H. Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin va daneshjouyan-e Irani

(etahadiyeh-ye melli), vol. 1, Cologne: Nashr-e gardoun, 1377, p. 310. Hereafter: Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin.

[6](#)

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All quotes from “The 1971 CISNU Charter”, 12th Congress from Matin-Asgari, pp. 257–258.

[7](#)

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Matin-Asgari, pp. 124-125; Hamid Kowsari in Andisheh pouya, no. 34, Ordibehesht 1395.

[8](#)

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Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin, vol. 1, p. 352; Matin-Asgari, p. 131.

[9](#)

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Shanzdahom-e azar, no. 1, January 1974, as referred to in Matin-Asgari, p. 141.

[10](#)

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Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin, vol. 1, p. 310.

[11](#)

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Payamhay-e sazemanha-ye enqelabi-e mosallah-e pishahang khalq, Germany: Komiteh-ye poshtibani as jonbesh-e novin-e enqelabi-e Iran, n.d., pp. 35–39.

[12](#)

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Shanzdahom-e azar, no. 2, March 1975, as referred to in Matin-Asgari, p. 145.

[13](#)

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Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin, vol. 1, p. 406.

[14](#)

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Payamhay-e sazemanha-ye enqelabi-e mosallah-e pishahang khalq, pp. 40, 49–50.

[15](#)

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Nabard-e Khalq, no. 6, Ordibehesht 1354, pp. 161, 187, and Payamhay-e sazemanha-ye enqelabi-e mosallah-e pishahang khalq, pp. 1–4.

[16](#)

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H. Showkat, *Tarikh bist saleh*, vol. 2, Saarbrücken: Nashr-e baztab, 1372, pp. 579–581.

[17](#)

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Heydar Tabrizi, pp. 42, 52.

[18](#)

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Heydar Tabrizi, pp. 85, 86.

[19](#)

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Showkat, *Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani*, vol. 2, p. 349.

[20](#)

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New York Times, 22 May 1975.

[21](#)

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Oriana Fallaci, “The Shah of Iran: An Interview with Mohammad Reza

Pahlavi”, New Republic, 1 December 1973.

[22](#)

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Showkat, Goftegou ba Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, vol. 2, p. 331; Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin, vol. 1, p. 108.

[23](#)

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M.K. Shannon, An Augury of Revolution: The Iranian Student Movement and American Foreign Policy 1960-1972 (Master’s thesis), University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 2009, pp. 96, 103, 112.

[24](#)

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Ettela’at, 18, 19 Esfand 1352; Le Monde, 11 Mars 1974 ; Nabard-e Khalq, no. 2, Farvardin 1353.

[25](#)

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Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin, pp. 404, 412.

[26](#)

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Peyman, no. 56, March 1974, as quoted in Showkat, Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e

mohaselin, vol. 1, pp. 403–404.

[27](#)

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Showkat, *Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin*, vol. 1, p. 414; *Matin-Asgari*, p. 147.

[28](#)

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Guardian, 9 May 1975, 17 February 1976.

[29](#)

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Le Monde, 7 and 15 May 1975; *Guardian*, 6 May 1975.

[30](#)

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Ettela'at, 10 Dey 1354.

[31](#)

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Le Monde, 5 and 9 January 1976; *Guardian*, 10 January 1976.

[32](#)

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Matin-Asgari, p. 154; Showkat, *Konfedrasyon-e jahani-e mohaselin*, vol. 1, p. 414.

[33](#)

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Le Monde, 3 and 5 February 1976.

[34](#)

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Le Monde, 4 February 1976.

[35](#)

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Matin-Asgari, p. 154.

[36](#)

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Be ravayat-e asnad-e SAVAK, *Chap dar Iran*, vol. 12, Tehran: Markaz-e barrasi-e asnad-e tarikhi-e vezarat-e ettela'at, 1383, pp. 438–441; Ettela'at, 16 Shahrivar 1355; Amnesty International Briefing, Iran (Briefing Paper no. 7), Nottingham: Amnesty International Publications, November 1976, p. 2.

[37](#)

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Le Monde, 4, 10 November and 1 December 1976; *Libération*, 4 November 1976.

[38](#)

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Ettela'at, 12, 17 Aban 1355. Ettela'at erroneously refers to Firouz Sedaqat. Thanks to Kazem Kardavani for his correction.

[39](#)

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New York Times, 10 November 1976; *Le Monde*, 21 December 1976; *Ettela'at*, 27 Aban 1355; *Front Liberaire des lutes de classes*, no. 59, 25 December 1976.

[40](#)

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Matin-Asgari, p. 155.

Prelude to the Shah's Free Fall

The 1975–1977 campaigns of CISNU were haunting the regime. Instead of feeling elated after its victories against the guerrillas at home, the regime was caught in a web that the guerrilla movement had spawned. Almost six years after banning CISNU, the regime demonstrated deep frustration and concern over the Confederation's ability to damage Iran's image and position in the West. Six years of vigorous publicity campaigns had reversed public opinion in the West against the Shah's regime. CISNU had turned significant international organizations, with substantial moral authority and weight, against the regime. The change in international perception towards the Shah forced Western policymakers to deal more cautiously with him. News of Iran's human rights abuses alerted the US Congress, jeopardizing the Shah's traditionally secure and almost unlimited access to US arms. One of the Shah's most important aspirations and priorities was to turn Iran into a major military world power. To realize this dream, the Shah needed to purchase the most sophisticated and advanced arms.

When on 30 May 1972, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger had travelled to Iran, the Shah was given the go-ahead "to purchase any U.S. weapons system he desired, in any quantity, short of nuclear weapons".¹

The Nixon Doctrine had empowered the Shah as never before. On 9 January 1973, Joseph Farland, the US Ambassador in Tehran, reported that "the students' one real success to date has been to influence international opinion in their

favour, but so long as the Shah is prepared to ignore such opinion, and he is quite capable of doing so, it seems unlikely that the students or the terrorists will succeed in forcing political change on their country.”²

▪

By exposing the regime’s maltreatment of dissidents at home, CISNU and its collaborators were forcing the Shah to take stern notice of international public opinion. Incapable of calming down the international uproar, feeling abandoned by his international allies, and faced with continuing domestic discontent, the Shah was gradually worn down. He became increasingly hesitant, wavering, and finally paralysed.

From 1975, criticism of the Iranian regime by the international press had become recurrent and common. In the past, this would have been bothersome to the Shah, but now it was outright threatening. As the Western press increased criticism of Iranian affairs, the Shah interpreted this negativity incorrectly, as some sort of vote of no confidence in his regime by the US administration. With the departure of Nixon, and the presidency of Gerald Ford, the regime felt the heat of an orchestrated wave of anti-regime reporting in the US media. The Shah wondered if a conspiracy against him was in the making. Richard Helms, the US Ambassador to Iran, was trusted by both the Shah and Kissinger. He reported to Kissinger that the Shah, and other Iranian leaders, “were convinced that the United States was looking for some kind of confrontation with Iran”. Helms added that “the atmosphere here on U.S.–Iran relations has not been of the best recently” and referred to the “usual conspiratorial view of life that prevails here”.³

▪

▪

The Western press reveals secrets

From an international perspective, the year 1975 did not augur well for the Shah. In January, the Sunday Times had published a detailed special report on

SAVAK's methods of dealing with dissidents in Iran.⁴

▪

The unprecedented and incriminating article, called "Torture in Iran", was indicative of the pressure which was building up against Iran and its abuse of human rights. In the 1974–1975 annual report of Amnesty International, Martin Ennals, its Secretary General, wrote that "the Shah of Iran retains his benevolent image despite the highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civilian courts and a history of torture which is beyond belief."⁵

▪

On 4 March 1975, Pete Stark, the Democratic Congressman from California, "brought to the House's attention articles from the San Francisco Examiner, Harper's Magazine and the London Sunday Times" about Iran's repressive regime. He also presented Amnesty International's data on torture in Iran to members of the Congress.⁶

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According to Roy Atherton, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East, the Shah was worried about "the hostile attitude of the Congress towards him".⁷

▪

On 16 March 1975, the New York Times published an excerpt of an article by the Iranian intellectual and filmmaker Ahmad Farouqy, originally written for a British periodical. This was less than two weeks after Congressman Stark's comments in Congress, and some two months before the Shah's scheduled official state visit to the US. In his article "Repression in Iran", Farouqy spoke of an "age-old dynamic of repression and suppression". Farouqy, who resided in Paris, claimed that "Iranians, to whom all possibility of freedom of expression and cultural identity is denied, have no other choice but to resort to armed resistance." This, he suggested, explained the tragic violence in today's Iran.⁸

▪

Farouqy's article in the New York Times, justifying armed resistance in Iran, was different from the way this influential newspaper had previously addressed the guerrillas in early 1971. Immediately after Siyahkal, the New York Times had referred to the executed political dissidents as an "underground gang" charged with "killing, armed robbery, illegal possession of arms and foreign documents".⁹

▪
From 1971 to 1974, the urban guerrillas had been usually referred to as “terrorists”, and on very few occasions, as “guerrillas”.¹⁰

▪
By November 1975, however, the international press was giving full coverage to “the Shah’s Police State” and claiming that Iran was “Mussolini’s Italy”. The Western public were informed of gruesome events happening in Iran. The Observer reported that “It is clear that almost routine methods of torture include whipping with a kind of metal whisk, violent electric shocks ... and the toasting of prisoners on a metal table, heated red-hot, across which victims are stretched on a grill and then interrogated.”¹¹

▪
▪
Disdain for torture

The Shah’s worst suspicions were confirmed on 30 June 1976, when Congress passed legislation, stating that “a principal goal of the foreign policy of the United States is to promote the increased observance of internationally recognized human rights by all countries.” Public Law 94-329 barred the United States from providing security assistance “to any country, the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights”, except under circumstances detailed in this Law.¹²

▪
The Shah construed the legislation as one aimed at his method of governance. The new law defined “gross violations of internationally recognized human rights” as including “torture, or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, prolonged detention without charges and trial, and other flagrant denials of the right to life, liberty, or security of persons”.

On the heels of PL 94-329, the Subcommittee on International Organizations of

the House of Representatives met to discuss human rights in Iran. They met on 3 August and 8 September 1976. Donald Fraser, Chairman of the Subcommittee, opened the meeting by announcing that “the situation in Iran has been one of primary concern to a number of international nongovernmental organizations active in the field of human rights.” Fraser went on to report on Amnesty International’s negative assessment of Iran’s human rights record. He then called on William Butler, President of the International Commission of Jurists, to report on his findings. Butler had travelled to Iran in September and October of 1975 on a fact-finding mission.¹³

▪

The lengthy and thorny details of his finding not appropriate for a House of Representatives hearing had been published in his report back in March 1976.

The Butler–Levasseur report was alarming. In his “Report on human rights in Iran”, Butler maintained that “in practice”, freedom of “speech and the press” were absent in Iran. The government, he announced, exercised “tight controls” over the radio, television, and published materials. Concerning the independence of the judiciary, Butler posited that “the Shah through his Prime Minister appoints all judges at all levels, throughout the country” and could “dismiss them at will”. The decision to make political arrests, Butler explained, was made by “the Joint Committee of the National Police and the SAVAK [The Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee]”, presided by “the much feared chairman Sabeti”.¹⁴

▪

Butler spoke of six thousand political prisoners, three quarters of whom were being held in provisional detention. In Iran, he said, SAVAK operated “its own prison for interrogation of suspects and detainees” and was “accountable to no one except the Shah”. Butler concluded that “there can be no doubt that torture has been systematically practiced over a number of years against recalcitrant suspects under interrogation by the SAVAK.” To the dismay of his audience, Butler added that SAVAK operated “throughout the world” wherever Iranian students congregated.¹⁵

▪

Faced with recurrent condemnations of human rights abuse, the Shah demonstrated signs of phobia and exasperation. On 29 August 1976, Assadollah ‘Alam told his majesty that the foreign media were conducting a very hard campaign against Iran. The Shah responded that the offensive was “being

orchestrated by the communists and the stupid Americans”.¹⁶

▪

Less than a fortnight later, on 12 September 1976, the Shah explained that the high-pitched criticism by the Western press of his domestic politics was the work of the Jews. He argued that it was the Jews who controlled the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Time Magazine. When ‘Alam reminded the Shah of his own thesis, that it was probably the Soviets, and the simple-minded Americans who were behind this “grand campaign”, the Shah responded, “This may also be correct.”¹⁷

▪

The Shah extended President Giscard d’Estaing of France, and his wife, a particularly warm reception during their official visit on 4 October 1976. Giscard d’Estaing referred to the fact that, in the eyes of France, “Iran was a partner of hope and confidence in the future.” Concurrently, Eric Rouleau, Le Monde’s well-connected reporter, wrote on the excesses of SAVAK in Iran. Rouleau enquired, “Why create such a gigantic police system, why so many arrests, summary trials and executions?” In his view, the real threat to the Shah’s throne came from unrest among high school and university students, as well as unrest among workers.¹⁸

▪

The Le Monde articles encapsulated the West’s dual view of the Shah’s regime. Western governments viewed the Shah’s regime as a stable and dependable partner, while a growing share of Western civil society came to see it as a “brutal”, “barbarous”, and “dictatorial” regime.¹⁹

▪

On 1 October 1976, the British Foreign Office reported on how public opinion in Britain had been turned against the Iranian regime. R.M. James reported on the “sensitivity of Ministers, Labour MPs, trade unions, the Press and the public about the allegedly repressive regime in Iran, and the international activities of SAVAK”. He concluded that “Iran is destined to become next year’s Good Cause.”²⁰

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The grand anti-Shah conspiracy

From late 1974, the Iranian regime believed that an international conspiracy was in the making by the Confederation of Iranian Students, international human rights organizations, the international press, and the lawmakers of Western countries. On 28 November 1976, Amnesty International (AI) released a Briefing Paper on Iran. This report was a detailed account of SAVAK's practices. It made a strong case that words and acts, and even suspicion of words and acts, which could be construed as signs of opposition to the Shah's regime were punished. AI accused SAVAK of acting with impunity, inside and outside Iran, to repress all opposition severely.²¹

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The twelve-page paper lamented the arbitrary arrest of suspected political opponents who were held incommunicado for long periods before being charged or tried. AI deplored the executions and unofficial deaths in Iran. Finally, it denounced the lack of legal safeguards and unsatisfactory trial procedures. The AI report focused on the "extremely ruthless" methods of SAVAK towards any political opposition in Iran. The brief presented the Shah's regime and SAVAK, not only as a threat to people in Iran but to democracy and the rule of law in countries where a "sizeable Iranian community" resided.²²

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Amnesty International's report on prison conditions was dark. It provided evidence of torture, as had been reported by Maitre Nuri Albala, who had seen the "appalling burns" on Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh's "stomach and back" during his trip to Iran (January and February 1972). AI relied on the eyewitness account of Reza Baraheni, a well-known Iranian novelist, poet, and literary critic arrested in 1973, to prove torture of dissidents. It concluded that Iran was a country where "freedom of speech and association" was non-existent, the press "strictly censored", and trade unions were "illegal". Workers' protests were dealt with "severely", sometimes resulting in prison and death, and political activity was "restricted to participation in the Rastakhiz Party". Academic freedom, it maintained, was "also restricted", and students and their teachers were "kept under surveillance by SAVAK".²³

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In contrast to the Shah's picture of Iran standing at the doors of the "Great Civilization", Amnesty International characterized the country as an Orwellian political inferno. The international press, on both sides of the Atlantic, referred to this report. One newspaper carried the headline "Iran's political prisoners said to be over 25,000", while another reported, "Amnesty International denounces the use of systematic torture in Iran by the political police."²⁴

▪

On Monday, 29 November 1976, one day after the release of the AI Briefing Paper, 'Alam, the Minister of Court, lamented the "untimeliness" of a highly damaging Amnesty International report against Iran.²⁵

▪

From March 1976 to the end of November 1976, two reputable international organizations recognized by the United Nations made public three highly damaging reports on Iran's human rights abuses. The Butler–Levasseur report for the International Commission of Jurists appeared in March 1976. Amnesty International published its annual report of 1975–1976 in September 1976 and its Briefing Report on Iran in November 1976.²⁶

▪

Clearly, the pace and intensity of criticism was picking up speed.

Following these reports, on 2 January 1977, the US State Department made its first detailed report on human rights conditions abroad. In this report, it identified Iran as one of the six countries that had "violated human rights to varying degrees". The State Department ruled that Iran, along with the other five countries, "should nevertheless continue to receive American military support".²⁷

▪

The State Department was obliged to report on human rights conditions in order to provide US military support. This development indicated that the executive had yielded to pressure from Congress. A year earlier, in 1976, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had refused to comply with an earlier Congressional law requiring country reports on human rights status as a prerequisite for arms transfers. SAVAK's excesses were becoming a major concern for the US administration, even before President Carter took office.

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A last-ditch effort against the guerrilla–CISNU coalition

President-elect Jimmy Carter's commitment to human rights, in contrast to the Nixon and Ford administration, led the Shah to suspect that Carter "considered him a tyrant".²⁸

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Carter's election threw the Shah back to the news of Kennedy's Presidency. The new US administration was going to carefully review US arms transfers, in light of the recipient countries' human rights record. This new step added to the Shah's ever-growing paranoia. Three days before Carter was to take office, and probably at the behest of SAVAK, the Iranian regime launched an elaborate campaign in the Iranian press. The purpose of this operation was to discredit CISNU and Amnesty International. It hoped to make a case for their "perverse and wicked agenda" and link them to the guerrilla movement in Iran. The regime aimed at slamming the organizations instrumental in exposing its violations of human rights. By vilifying its "assailants" at home and abroad, the regime expected to salvage its own good name.

After Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford on 2 November 1976, Parviz Sabeti, head of SAVAK's Third Bureau, wrote a report to the Shah. He emphasized that given the opposition's excitement about Carter's Presidency, it would be best to take a hard stand against them, and show "no signs of fear or retreat".²⁹

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On 1 January 1977, a fortnight before the beginning of the regime's propaganda assault against its adversaries, 'Alam reported that the Shah was very upset about the charges of human rights violations, and was in a belligerent mood.³⁰

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On the same day that the campaign began, 'Alam reported that it was decided

that instead of retreating before incriminating reports against Iran, it was best to go on the offensive and attack.³¹

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The SAVAK press operation comprised lengthy daily articles on CISNU, Amnesty International, guerrilla organizations, and opposition groups and parties. It tried to establish sinister links between all domestic and foreign organizations deemed adversarial. This unholy alliance was supposedly an international conspiracy against Iran, the handiwork of a hodgepodge of international communists, capitalist lackeys, foreign intelligence services, and terrorists. The nine-day campaign was a drive to convince the new Carter administration that it should pay no attention to CISNU, the international organizations reporting against Iran's abuse of human rights, or the foreign press reporting on it. The articles were partially based on interrogations and confessions obtained from political prisoners by SAVAK, and partially on the actual history of CISNU. So, facts were peppered with unfounded innuendos, accusations, and far-fetched evil scenarios fit for a confusing thriller.

The first article typed in large font appeared on the top half of the front page of the Iranian press. This article, published on 16 January 1977, was entitled "Secret Documents Obtained from Amnesty International Unmasks a Vast Anti-Iran Campaign Which Will Begin Tomorrow".³²

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More articles appeared on successive days. Each article claimed to inform Iranians of the "conspiracies and plots" endangering their "integrity, independence and national interests". The articles intended to correct the "irrational judgement" of international authorities, "unbecoming of Iran's prestige".³³

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Even though the propaganda operation seemed directed at Iranians, it was for foreign consumption, and more specifically for President Carter's benefit. In the past, the Shah had never felt the need to explain or justify anything to his own people. Now, the regime hoped that by presenting CISNU as a communist organization backing guerrillas in Iran, it could once again capitalize on US anti-communist sentiments. Back in 1953, the red scare tactic employed by the Shah's proponents had successfully worked to secure the participation of the US in the overthrow of Mosaddeq.

SAVAK's operation aimed to explain that human rights violations were for a justifiable reason. Arbitrary arrests and torture were the price to be paid to combat international terrorism and communism. SAVAK wished to show off its excellent job of keeping Iran free of terrorists and communists. Finally, the regime wished to convince Carter that he needed to turn a blind eye to violations of human rights to safeguard Iran from communism. To this end, it was best for Carter to rally behind the Shah, to forget about human rights violations, and continue to transfer the sophisticated arms that the Shah coveted.

The regime tried to prove that CISNU was the creation of the Tudeh Party and had subsequently fallen into the hands of other communist tendencies. Notwithstanding the marked divisions among various communist tendencies and parties at this time, the articles argued that CISNU was an umbrella organization belonging to a monolithic "international communism". CISNU was correctly labelled as an organization agitating against the regime and in the service of the guerrillas. The articles then sought to prove that the guerrilla organizations in Iran were pawns of foreign powers and serving foreign interests.

The Fada'i Organization was initially depicted as being in collusion with Teymour Bakhtiyar, SAVAK's first director, and subsequently, connected to the Baader–Meinhof Group, and supported by Libya. The Mojahedin organization was argued to be supported by the Tudeh Party, and therefore, by the Soviet Union.³⁴

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The Iranian regime portrayed the Iranian guerrilla organizations and CISNU as two interlaced entities, engaged in espionage and sabotage for the benefit of foreign powers.

The eighth article in the series asserted that CISNU had been infiltrated by intelligence agencies of the West and East. It was depicted as a platform where foreign agents competed for hegemony. The article contended that, out of the fifty thousand students abroad, only two thousand were involved with CISNU. The villains were some five hundred hardcore activists and leaders. These lazy students who were "unsuccessful in their studies" were said to be "mercenaries in the pay of foreigners". The remaining 1,500 students involved with CISNU were categorized as "deceived and slavish followers". These were the groupies.

CISNU was presented as "an anti-Iranian and communist corporation, in the pay

of foreigners, and commissioned to operate against Iran, and its independent and nationalist policies". In this eighth article, the international plot against Iran thickened. The regime's theorists introduced another pernicious force, namely "certain Western greedy circles", along with their "spy agents and important Western intelligence agencies". It was this alliance of Western forces that held CISNU "as the sword of Damocles over the head of Iran's independent and nationalist policies". A final twist hyped the story. The article posited that CISNU's leadership had infiltrated radical Asian and African movements and was spying on them for the benefit of Western intelligence agencies.

To conclude, three explanations were put forward to explain Amnesty International's recent attacks on Iran. First, it was suggested that both CISNU and AI had been manipulated and taken advantage of by international communism. Second, AI's hard-line position was spurred by those foreign powers which had lost their economic and political footing in Iran. These were the "rich capitalist countries" and "the Eastern and Western superpowers", envious of Iran's economic independence. Third, AI and the Western press were financed by Western oil companies, taking revenge on Iran for its vital role in OPEC. By "demonstrating" that Amnesty International and the international press were pawns in the hands of international communism, rich capitalist countries, and the oil companies, the Iranian government rested its case against its adversaries.³⁵

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In January 1977, the British Ambassador in Iran had reported that "the growing hostility of the British press, and elements of public opinion in Britain towards Iran, has not yet affected inter-governmental relations." Eight months later, in October 1977, Anthony Parsons reported that the Shah was "experiencing a mood of paranoid hostility towards the Western media". In a rather unsettling report, Parsons, who had for long been a staunch supporter of the Shah and his policies, opined that the Shah "seems to have developed an obsession that there is an international conspiracy between a number of Western newspapers ... to synchronize hostile propaganda against Iran".³⁶

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Beating a fatal retreat

From early 1977, the regime was on the defensive, a posture it was not accustomed to. Beating a retreat before Western pressure, on 2 February 1977, the Iranian government announced that “Iranian prisons were open to foreign journalists.” One day later, 317 political prisoners who had been condemned in military courts were released from prison.³⁷

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In March 1977, Martin Ennals, the Secretary General of AI, was invited to Iran for talks with the Shah and Prime Minister Hoveyda. The Shah informed Ennals that “he would be willing to receive suggestions about ways in which judicial procedures in Iran might be improved.” Amnesty International maintained that in February 1977, the Shah “had reportedly ordered the abolition of torture in Iran”. In April 1977, for the first time since February 1972, foreign observers were allowed to attend the political trial of eleven political prisoners, and foreign journalists were allowed to interview political detainees.³⁸

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The fact that the Shah had agreed to see Ennals, who had been cast as a prime enemy of Iran and Iranians, was a clear sign that the Shah wished to placate what he suspected to be Carter’s reproach to his rule. The Shah continued to hope that, by promising improvements in his human rights performance to the international community, he would be able to neutralize international criticism of his rule. He did not realize, however, that the real source of his problems was the way he was treating his own people. The international public opinion and press, Amnesty International, and members of parliament in France, the US, UK, and the Netherlands were the only mediums deploring the price which the Iranian opposition, armed and unarmed, were paying for defying their regime.

The regime failed to see that its anti-guerrilla campaign and the collateral damage it had inflicted upon Iranians was becoming its Achilles heel. Back in August 1972, David Hirst, of the Guardian, had argued that the guerrillas were “in part at least, the perverse manifestation of legitimate discontents”. He observed that “In tracking down guerrillas, it [SAVAK] has arrested and maltreated hundreds of innocent suspects.”³⁹

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The guerrilla movement had brought to the fore the regime's violence. Armed struggle had empowered the opposition, assisting it to overcome its self-image of febleness and fearfulness.

From fall 1977, crowds gradually snowballed and filled the streets of Tehran and Iran. After six years, the baton of struggle carried by the guerrillas and the student movement was passed on to the youth of a different kind of movement. This youth had been raised on the legend of the guerrillas. The Iranian youth, religious, agnostic, and atheist, had internalized the ethos of the guerrillas and walked in their footsteps to bring down the regime.

Notes

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Conclusion

Iranian modern and contemporary history has been marked by incessant gushes, trickles, and steady flows of ideas and movements reacting to nondemocracy, authoritarianism, and despotism. Unrepresentative, arbitrary, and bad political regimes and governments have sought all kinds of justifications to deny the Iranian people their primal right of “government of the people, by the people, for the people”. When verbal justifications and arguments have not sufficed to assure their docility, brute force has been employed unabashedly to clobber the populace into submission. In a cyclical manner, after a series of political disappointments and setbacks, Iranians lose faith in their leaders, and in those who have ruled them. Unable to reclaim their political rights and to participate in their political life, they withdraw and became introverted. Then comes a period of feeling insulted by their own resignation, and appeasement gives way to passive resistance. The politically aware react against hopelessness and gloom, turning to one form or another of political activism. And then again, comes a wave of persecution of some degree leaving fundamental goals unattained.

The history of state repression and violence to prevent the people’s sovereignty and deny their inalienable rights has been intertwined with the governed seeking solutions to counter and remedy their plight. The fact that nondemocracy, and some degree of despotism has characterized the natural political condition of the country, with a few exceptional years, is not much in dispute. What is and has been at the centre of argumentation and debate revolves around the appropriate method of dealing with unrepresentative regimes. Having acknowledged the curse of absolutism and bad government, generation after generation, Iranians have responded in three broad ways.

Some become cynical about politics and authority. They succumb to, rather than accept, the status quo. The cynics, themselves constituting three broad groups, seek solace and revenge in cursing, damning, and ridiculing their regime while

maintaining their distance from political engagement. They go about their lives, convinced that nothing can change the karma of this great nation. For the first group of cynics, Iranian history, since ancient times, has been one where the majority has pleaded in vain and petitioned the tyrants (bidadgaran) for justice (dad). This group is convinced that the wheels of state and society have been going “round and round” and “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”. This is the reality of political cynics faced with the indestructible juggernaut of Iranian despotism. To survive, the politically emasculated, conscious of their state of impotence, find joy and pleasure in nagging and negativism.

The second group of cynics, the politicophobes, have become scared, tired, and disgusted with politics. In a country like Iran there exists a tradition of sudden political upheavals followed by brisk reprisals and abrupt shifts in political fortunes, even in times of “stability”. Seemingly inexplicable eruptions and retributions shrouded in political opaqueness foster a strong underlying culture of believing in foreign conspiracies. Blaming the almighty foreigner, who at times was the puppeteer, enforces a sense of political impotence justifying withdrawing from politics. The cynics defend their fear of politics by repeating the common expression, “It is the work of foreigners” (kar kar-e khareji ast). For them, politics is dirty, beyond their control, void of scruples and ethics, and so why get mixed up in its mess?¹

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Finally, the third group of cynics, the majority within this category, are those who are just not interested in politics. Their allegiance is to their own welfare and that of their family. Some among them plunge into the typical Iranian mindset of “This world is made but of two days” (donya do rouzeh). They adopt a carefree attitude towards what goes on around them, turning off political noise and interference, pro- or anti-regime. They go about their own life avoiding politics.

But the political creeps back invariably into their rejection of politics. Long-term despotism takes the fun out of living for the day, puts into question the excuse of blaming the foreigner, weighs in on the private realm, and renders the excuse of cultural determinism unsatisfactory and boring. Even when the political cynics take delight in carefree and passing moments of merrymaking, they manage to find some seemingly inconceivable angle to snub, irritate, and defy the suffocating authority of their unbeatable foe. This seemingly pacified majority, which has been going about its own muted ways for centuries, belittled by

authority and putting up with the status quo, has acted sometimes spectacularly out of character. It has, at times, upset the apple cart in irreparable ways, sending absolutist rulers packing their bags and searching for a refuge.

Throughout centuries, a minority of Iranians, predominantly intellectuals, have dedicated their lives to political change through reform. Unlike the subdued but disgruntled majority, reformers are unable to ignore the existing political realities and reconcile themselves with the perverse status quo. They feel a moral and ethical obligation to improve the political lot of Iranians. This second category are firm believers in effectuating marginal changes that would lead to fundamental structural transformations. Their preferred method of change is peaceful and non-violent. Their weapon is the word, serene or biting, written or spoken. They seek to dialogue with the powers that be, inviting them to appreciate and comply with the rules of democracy. This second category believes in convincing the powers that be of the rational and moral imperative of human dignity, rights, and democracy. Reformers believe that there resides an Ahura Mazda within Ahriman, and as Good Samaritans believe that, in time, the blind will eventually see the light of faith, reason, and truth.

This second category are convinced that political deadlocks are sealed with hefty padlocks but will ultimately be opened with the keys of common sense and sagacity. That is why, when there is a political opening or a period of liberalization, they enter the political scene, with great enthusiasm. For a time, they make important inroads, even bring about important institutional changes, but faced with the eventual backlash of despotism, their efforts are repulsed. Reformers dread, and try at all costs to avoid, the vicious cycle of violence, bloodletting, and ultimate chaos. The consequences of violent methods of political change have always haunted, repelled, and paralysed the reformers. Their historical memory reminds them that violence fosters violence without necessarily attaining the desired objectives. Faced with unyielding despotic rule, they become ironically invested in both the status quo and the post status quo. The status quo which does not provide political security for its citizens, but prevents society from slipping into chaos, and the post status quo which promises to provide political security but might require a transition period of chaos.

In their quest for change and betterment against great odds, reformers have had mixed destinies. They have been threatened, persecuted, imprisoned, slaughtered, silenced, and co-opted. Some of them have bounced back from their

ill treatment, and stubbornly persevered in their quest. Some have fallen into the first category. Their record in Iran is a mixed one but, despite their efforts, they have not succeeded in changing the undemocratic political status quo. There is still hope.

In the eyes of despots, reformers irrespective of their non-violent methods are still subversives. By renouncing violence, reformers often naively expect the establishment to respect their non-violence. The experience of the successful reformist, Mohammad Mosaddeq, proved to be short-lived, due to his disdain for violence and his emphasis on speaking the language of law to the lawless. Reformers suffer from some degree of political agnosticism. Even though they constantly reprimand violence, they know it to be the official language of the political status quo. They try hard to avoid or delay violence by keeping to the redlines set by the status quo, yet they are never sheltered from it. Violence is imposed on reformists every time the establishment finds their narrative too intrusive and contagious for its safe sustenance and tenure. As much as reformists shun violence, it becomes their eternal shadow in undemocratic and unaccountable societies.

Finally, among the small minority of Iranians who cannot make their peace with absolutism, there are the uncompromising revolutionaries. They too feel morally and ethically responsible for the unfreedom of their countrymen. What radicalizes and revolutionizes them is the suffocating reality of oppression and injustice exercised by the status quo. Contrary to the reformist, the revolutionaries are invested in the overthrow of the status quo. They part ways with peaceful reform, in autocratic, and despotic societies, as unrealistic and impractical. They see violence as the only reasonable method of countering the ultimately violent language of absolutist states. They are not impressed with wordmongering theoreticians, academics, and analysts who replace action with explanations and inquiries. For the practising revolutionaries, and not the armchair revolutionary theoreticians, the radical variant of reformists, time is of the essence. They are pressed to see meaningful action taken during their own lifetime to end despotism and absolutism. As Che Guevara acknowledged, Job's patience is not for the revolutionaries, but his stamina for enduring countless trials is. Yet, the outcome of their violence has not yielded immediate results and their methods have fallen out of favour. The postmodern hedonist state of mind, the high stakes, and incalculable opportunity cost of armed struggle have pushed revolutionary solutions way below a second-best option.

For almost six years, the guerrillas raised the banner of armed resistance to the Shah's political hegemony. The Iranian revolutionaries captured the imagination of socially and politically conscious Iranians and became a constant reminder to the establishment and its foreign allies of Iran's political crisis. The Fada'is went beyond small student revolutionary circles and groups and forged a proper movement. They produced theoreticians and practitioners, an organizational system and structure, leaders, and foot soldiers. The Fada'i movement proved capable of reproducing itself, and expanding its organizational base faced with an adversary with almost unlimited resources and know-how. It offered politically concerned Iranian university students an alternative method of political expression.

The Fada'is were what they claimed to be, self-sacrificers for the cause of the people. Their claim to social and political responsibility was backed by their action. They derived their power and will from the force of their conviction in their path, method, and objectives. They made the difficult and demanding personal and political choice of putting their lives on the line, hoping to set an example that people would follow. Their organization crashed on 29 June 1976. Had history ended on that day, all their sacrifices would have been in vain. Up to that date, Hamid Ashraf had secured the cohesion and unity of the Fada'is. He had kept the guerrillas, and the embattled Fada'i Organization, motivated, and on course. Most importantly, Ashraf had exercised his moral and revolutionary authority to absorb and temper Jazani's divisive discourse and keep unity within the organization. With Ashraf's death, the original momentum created by the movement enabled the Fada'i Organization to survive.

But by mid-1976, the military operations of the guerrillas, and the harsh response of the regime, had caused an anomalous sociopolitical undercurrent, quietly and softly gnawing away at the moral authority and legitimacy of the regime. The Fada'is forced the establishment, and its security apparatus, into a complex game whereby almost every move of the regime to secure its own survival created counterforces eroding its supremacy and domination. Clashes between selfless young men and women, and Iran's discredited security apparatus impacted the growing urban population. As satisfied as Iranians were with their economic and cultural well-being, segments of the urban population were regularly reminded that others were risking their lives to end their political exclusion and voicelessness.

The armed struggle movement had gradually succeeded in emboldening a public

which had been belittled and humiliated after the 1953 coup. It was this same public which ultimately formed a different kind of “people’s army”, putting into motion what came to be the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Many among the rank and file of this new “people’s army” were sympathizers of the Fada’i legacy, while others rode on the intransigent mood the guerrillas had fostered. The soldiers in this army used all means available.

Iranian history is a vast canvas of many designs, styles, events, characters, and colours. A red corner of it belongs to those who came to be known as the Fada’is. They marked contemporary Iranian history on many levels, politically, ideologically, psychologically, and culturally. Their history must be told. Taking distance and rendering a cool-headed analysis is difficult because of the subject of investigation. Today, a group of ahistorical journalists and researchers in Iran position themselves in opposition to the Fada’is and the guerrilla movement. Some of these are independent, and some are hired hands. Some are highly ideological, claiming to be post-ideological. What they share is affective anger towards the Fada’is, which often borders on hysteria.

Times and values have changed. Thinking, speaking, let alone promoting violent methods of political change, irrespective of the concrete conditions giving rise to them, has become dubious, if not blasphemous. If today the Fada’is stand accused of violence and terrorism, in the 1970s they were the messengers of hope and liberation. Memories are short and especially tainted by the 1979 revolution and its outcomes. Serious study of the history, predicament, and objectives of the Fada’is in their diversity is complicated and taxing. This work has intended to tell the story of armed struggle by Marxist revolutionaries from around 1964 to 1976. It has attempted to extrapolate some of its political consequences. It has also tried to avoid making judgements and passing verdicts.

The Fada’is popularized a national culture of contestation, defiance, and resistance, which gradually permeated Iranian urban society. This new culture of audacity, in turn, produced its new forms of daring artistic expression in the fields of music, poetry, literature, children’s stories, theatre, and film. Siyahkal put into motion a snowball effect of protest, and valour. Artists, inspired by the revolutionaries, and dejected by the regime’s cruelty, produced revolutionary poetry, literature, songs, and plays, which in turn further moved, radicalized, and incited ordinary people to stand up, and revolt. In the words of Mohammad-Reza Shafi’i-Kadkani, Iran’s poet and literary laureate, “Armed struggle, which began with Siyahkal and was followed by other epic conflicts, transformed the concept

of struggle and the social outlook of the young generation, in other words, the majority of our society.”²

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Notes

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For the idea of this second group, the politcophobes, I am indebted to Shahram Ghanbari.

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Chronology

1953

19 August: Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq is overthrown by a coup masterminded by the CIA.

7 December: Students at Tehran University protest the resumption of diplomatic relations with Britain. The army opens fire and three students are shot dead. This day becomes a landmark for commemorating student repression.

1960

10 January: High school students with National Front sympathies launch a three-day demonstration which rocks the capital. Future members of the Jazani Group involved in these demonstrations are Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, 'Aziz Sarmadi, Sa'id (Mash'ouf) Kalantari, and Ali-Akbar Safa'i-Farahani.

21 July: The Mosaddeqist National Front announces the resumption of its activities. They call themselves the Second National Front.

1961

5 May: 'Ali Amini replaces Ja'far Sharif-Emami as Prime Minister, promising political liberalization, defence of democratic freedoms, and complying with the Constitution.

18 May: An unprecedented political rally of fifty to eighty thousand people is organized by the Mosaddeqist National Front in Jalaliyeh.

21 July: A second National Front rally in Jalaliyeh is thwarted. Some fifty-two members of the Mosaddeqist opposition are arrested and the military are deployed throughout Tehran. Bijan Jazani and Hasan Zia-Zarifi are actively involved in the student demonstrations on this day.

1962

21 January: Objecting to the expulsion of a few high school students for political activities, students at Tehran University hold a rally on campus. Elite parachute forces enter the university campus. They arrest fifty to three hundred students and seriously injure some two hundred to four hundred students.

21 January: Future members of the Jazani Group, Bijan Jazani, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, and Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, are actively involved in the student unrest. Hamid Ashraf and Farrokh Negahdar rush to the scene but are chased away by a military patrol.

18 April: Heavy rain causes a disastrous flood in the low-income neighbourhood of Javadiyeh in Tehran.

3–10 May: Some five hundred university students pool resources to bring emergency relief to the people of Javadiyeh. Future members of Jazani's Group, Zia-Zarifi, Jazani, 'Aziz Sarmadi, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, Mohammad Kianzad, and Farrokh Negahdar, take part in these activities.

25 December: The first session of the National Front Congress opens in

Tehran with 176 members. The tense sessions, pitting the conservative old guard against the radicalized students, end on 2 January 1963.

1963

9 January: At the 1st Congress of Iran's Rural Cooperatives in Tehran, some 4,200–4,800 delegates represent the new small-landowning class from all over Iran. The Shah presents his six-item socio-economic White Revolution and asks for its approval through a referendum.

22 January: Hundreds of students gather on the grounds of Tehran University. They carry banners expressing their opposition to the “illegal referendum”. One banner reads, “Yes to reform, no to the Shah’s dictatorship.” This banner is the work of Hasan Zia-Zarifi, one of the founders of the Jazani Group.

23–24 January: The National Front and Mehdi Bazargan’s Iran Freedom Movement issue declarations against the referendum. Clashes break out in Qom between seminary students opposed to the referendum, and the Shah’s supporters. Ruhollah Khomeyni deplors the attack and demands the resignation of Prime Minister Asadollah ‘Alam. Leaders of the National Front and Iran Freedom Movement are rounded up.

26 January: More than ninety-nine percent of Iranians approve the Shah’s White Revolution in a national referendum.

5 June: After the arrest of Khomeyni, 4,000 to 49,000 take to the streets in Tehran. Some 418 to 704 are arrested and some 32 to 85 are killed.

5 June: Future members of Jazani’s Group, Zia-Zarifi, Jazani, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, and Farrokh Negahdar, are active during this day of insurrection.

June/July: ‘Ali Shari‘ati writes an editorial in Iran-e Azad, the National Front’s monthly published in France. In it he heralds the end of “peaceful struggle”, calls for “the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah”, and promotes “the expressive language of guns and the destructive force of war” as the appropriate

response to “the enemy’s flood of fire”.

September: Bijan Jazani, Manouchehr Kalantari, and Heshmatollah Shahrzad meet once a month and talk about violent methods of struggle among other topics.

November/December 1963: The Message of University Students (Payam-e Daneshjou), the unofficial publication of the Third National Front, is launched. Jazani is charged with its publication.

1964

9 February: The National Front adopts Allahyar Saleh’s proposal of a policy of “patience and waiting” (siyasat-e sabr o entezar) towards the regime.

March/April: Payam-e Daneshjou rejects “patience and waiting” and promotes “smashing the diabolical forces of despotism and overthrowing colonial rule”.

March/April: Payam-e Daneshjou reminds university students that “we intend to obtain freedom and it is to this end that we will be at war with dictatorship, bullying and despotism.”

September: Ghafour Hasanpour begins his political recruitment at Tehran’s Polytechnic University. His first network is composed of Sho‘a‘ollah Moshayyedi, Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli, Esmā‘il Mo‘ini-‘Araqi, and Seyf Dalil-Safa‘i.

1965

21 January: Prime Minister Hasan-‘Ali Mansour is assassinated by Mohammad Bokhara‘i, a member of the armed branch of the Islamic

Coalition of Mourning groups.

January/February: Payam-e Daneshjou presents Mansour's assassination as a response to closing all democratic venues to the opposition.

22 May: Jazani is arrested for his role in the publication of Payam-e Daneshjou.

20 October: Members of Seyyed Kazem Bojnourdi's "Islamic Nations Party" (Hezb-e mellal-e eslami) are arrested in the hills of Darabad, Tehran.

7 December: Commemorating the 1953 killings at Tehran University, Ghafour Hasanpour posts an announcement at Tehran's Polytechnic University, called "On the Struggle with the Shah's Dictatorship".

1965–1966: Hasan Zia-Zarifi writes "The Problems of the Anti-Colonial and Liberation Movement of the Iranian People" and "The Main Responsibilities of Iranian Communists under Present Conditions". These writings are first published in London in November/December 1972 under the title The Jazani Group's Thesis.

Academic year 1965–1966: Bijan Hirmanpour constitutes a Marxist–Leninist study group at Tehran University.

Academic year 1965–1966: 'Abbas Meftahi and Kazem Salahi form a Marxist group and record and transcribe Farsi programmes broadcast by the Tudeh Party's Peyk-e Iran Radio and Peking Radio.

1966

April/May: At the behest of Manouchehr Kalantari, Hasan Zia-Zarifi joins the Jazani Group.

June/July: Mohammad-Majid Kianzad puts Ghafour Hasanpour in contact with the Jazani Group.

July/August: At the behest of Zia-Zarifi, Hasanpour's Lahijan network is gradually reactivated. This network is eventually composed of Abolqasem Taherparvar, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, Geda-'Ali Boustani, Reza 'Abedinpour, and Eskandar (Morteza) Rahimi-Meschi.

August: Jazani constitutes a political and intellectual circle composed of Qasem Rashidi, Majid Ahsan, and Farrokh Negahdar, and places it under the direction of Heshmatollah Shahrzad and then Zia-Zarifi.

August/September: Members of the Jazani Group meet with members of 'Abbas Sourki's group and decide to work together. They agree that armed struggle is required to change the political status quo.

August/September: Zerar Zahedian and Naser Aqayan, members of Sourki's group, join Jazani's Group. Naser Aqayan is a SAVAK informant, reporting on the activities of Sourki's group.

Fall: A Marxist-Leninist study circle is formed in Sari, Mazandaran, composed of Naqi Hamidiyan, Ahmad Farhoudi, and Rahim Karimiyan. The group is connected to 'Abbas Meftahi, who is a student at Tehran University.

December: Hasanpour's second network at Tehran's Polytechnic University is composed of Mahmoud Navabakhsh, Ahmad Khorramabadi, Mehdi Same', Mohammad-Hasan Salehpour, Ebrahim Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i, and Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i.

Academic year 1966-1967: Amir-Parviz Pouyan travels to Tabriz. He is in contact with Samad Behrangi and Behrooz Dehqani.

1967

January/February: The leadership team of the Jazani Group is composed of Jazani, Manouchehr Kalantari, Heshmatollah Shahrzad, Zia-Zarifi, 'Abbas Sourki, and Zerar Zahedian.

February/March: The dormant military branch of the Jazani Group is reactivated.

Jazani takes over the leadership of the mountain team but confers operational responsibilities on his other uncle Sa' id Kalantari. Sourki takes charge of the urban team.

April/ May: Sourki's urban team is composed of 'Aziz Sarmadi, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, and Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani.

April/May: The mountain team of Jazani/Kalantari is composed of Jazani, Mohammad Choupanzadeh, Sa' id Kalantari, 'Ali-Akbar Safa' i-Farahani, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, and Hamid Ashraf.

July–September: Pouyan and Meftahi form a Marxist–Leninist group committed to combatting the Shah's regime. Mas' oud Ahmadzadeh joins the Group shortly afterwards.

October–December: The Sari circle is integrated into the Pouyan and Meftahi Group.

November: With the departure of Manouchehr Kalantari and Heshmatollah Shahrzad, the leadership committee of the Jazani Group dwindles to Jazani, Sourki, Zia-Zarifi, and Zahedian.

December: The Jazani Group plans to rob the Cooperative and Distribution Bank.

1968

8 January: The funeral procession of Gholam-Reza Takhti turns into a huge anti-regime demonstration. Students chant slogans against dictatorship and in favour of Mao and Che Guevara.

9 January: Sourki and Jazani are arrested on a tip by Naser Aqayan, the SAVAK informer.

12 January: Sa' id Kalantari, 'Aziz Sarmadi, 'Ali-Akbar Safa' i-Farahani, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, Mohammad Choupanzadeh, Ahmad Jalil-

Afshar, and Hamid Ashraf, all members of the military branch of Jazani's Group, leave for Mazandaran.

January: Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh begins his close association with Bijan Hirmanpour.

16 January – 14 February: 'Aziz Sarmadi, Zerar Zahediyan, Heshmatollah Shahrzad, Majid Ahsan, Farrokh Negahdar, Kiyoumars Izadi, Qasem Rashidi, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, and Ahmad Jalil-Afshar are arrested.

April/May: Sa'id Kalantari, Eskandar Sadeqinejad, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, and Hamid Ashraf rob a bank.

11 July: Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani cross the border into Iraq.

6 or 7 August: Sa'id Kalantari, Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, and Mohammad Choupanzadeh are arrested as they try to cross the border into Iraq. 'Abbas-'Ali Shahryari, in whom they had confided, is a SAVAK informer. Almost all members of the Jazani Group are behind bars.

31 August: Samad Behrangi drowns in the Aras river at the age of twenty-nine.

September: Members of the Mashhad branch of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh gather at Ne'mat Mirzazadeh's house to edit the final Farsi translation of Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* The members present are Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Bahman Ajang, Hamid Tavakoli, and Sa'id Ariyan.

October: Ghafour Hasanpour and Hamid Ashraf regroup and begin re-establishing contacts, assisted by Sadeqinejad. According to Ashraf, this new group is called the Jungle Group (gorouh-e jangal).

October: Kazem Salahi, his brother Javad Salahi Kazem, and Ahmad Zibrom form a three-man circle.

October/November: Ghafour Hasanpour constitutes three specialized teams: urban, mountain, and weapons procurement. The urban team is led by Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli and includes Mehdi Same', Houshang Delkhah, and Seyf Dalil-Safa'i. The mountain team is led by Ashraf and includes 'Abbas

Danesh-Behzadi and Ebrahim Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i. The weapons procurement team is led by Hasanpour and includes Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri.

December: A second Hasanpour network is activated in Lahijan. This network includes Houshang Nayyeri, Manouchehr Baha'ipour, and perhaps Jamshid Taheripour.

30 December: Jazani and thirteen members of his group are put on trial in Tehran. The military tribunal charges the "14-man group" with "founding a communist group and propagating communist ideas", as well as conducting "activities against state security". They receive jail sentences from three to fifteen years, with Jazani's being the longest.

Academic year 1968–1969: Like-minded left students gather around Asadollah Meftahi at Tabriz University, forming a network connected to the Pouyan-Ahmadzadeh and 'Abbas Meftahi Group.

1969

Early April: Pouyan and 'Abbas-'Ali Houshmand visit Tabriz and contact Samad Behrangi's close circle of friends, including Behrooz Dehqani, Kazem Sa'adati, 'Ali-Reza Nabdol, and 'Abdol-Manaf Falaki. This core of Behrangi's friends form the Tabriz branch of the Pouyan-Ahmadzadeh-Meftahi Group (P-A-M).

Spring: The Mashhad branch of the P-A-M Group now includes Hamid Tavakoli, Bahman Ajang, Gholamreza Galavi, Shahin Tavakoli and Sa'id Ariyan, Mohammad-Taqi Seyyed-Ahmadi, Mehdi Sovalouni, Hoseyn Seyyed-Nowzadi, and Mohammad-'Ali Salemi.

Fall: 'Abbas Meftahi establishes contact between the Dehqani/Sa'adati group in Tabriz and Asadollah Meftahi's group at Tabriz University.

September: At Ghafour Hasanpour's request, Iraj Nayyeri is transferred to a school in the village of Shabkhoslat (Shaqouzlat), close to Siyahkal.

October: Hasanpour and Houshang Nayyeri, Iraj's younger cousin, visit Iraj Nayyeri at his school and begin a tour of the region.

October–December: Sho' a' ollah Moshayyedi and the two Nayyeris go on reconnaissance missions around the mountainous and forest regions of Shabkhoslat, with a focus on Kakouh.

1970

By 1970: The P-A-M Group can claim at least sixty-six adherents.

January: Iraj Nayyeri and Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi carry out regular and systematic reconnaissance expeditions in and around Kakouh.

End of January: Safa'i-Farahani returns to Iran illegally and establishes contact with Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Sadeqinejad. The promising conditions in Iran induce him to go back to his base in Jordan and return with arms and ammunition.

March–May: Amir-Parviz Pouyan writes his influential treatise, *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Theory of Survival*.

April/August: Depots of food and equipment are prepared in the mountains, especially in the Kakouh area. Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i along with Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi and Iraj Nayyeri are principally involved with setting up storage depots.

June: Safa'i-Farahani and Saffari-Ashtiyani return to Iran with a considerable cache of smuggled arms: five revolvers, two machine guns, twelve grenades, bullets, and dynamite.

July–August: Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh writes his treatise, *Armed Struggle, Both Strategy and Tactic* at Jalal Naqqash's house.

August: 'Abbas Meftahi from the P-A-M Group and Safa'i-Farahani from the H-A-S (Hasanpour, Ashraf, and Safa'i-Farahani) Group meet through the

intermediary of Seyf Dalil-Safa'i. This is the start of a long negotiation process leading to the merger of the two groups.

Mid-August: The Vozara Street branch of the Melli Bank is attacked by members of the H-A-S Group. The assault team is composed of Safa'i-Farahani, Saffari-Ashtiyani, Ashraf, and Sadeqinejad.

5 September: Safa'i-Farahani leads his team composed of Jalil Enferadi, Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i, Mehdi Eshaqi, Hadi Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, and 'Abbas Danesh-Behzadi, all members of the H-A-S Group, to Mazandaran. The first leg of their reconnaissance mission trekking from Mazandaran to northern Gilan lasts some one and a half months.

Mid-September: Ashraf replaces Safa'i-Farahani and Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh replaces 'Abbas Meftahi in the negotiation process between the two groups.

20 October: Members of the P-A-M Group, in a team composed of Kazem Salahi (team commander), Ahmad Zibrom, Hamid Tavakoli, and Ahmad Farhoudi, attack the Vanak Street branch of the Melli Bank. The team is represented by members of the Tehran, Sari, and Mashhad branch of the Group.

23–25 November: Safa'i-Farahani's team begins the second leg of its reconnaissance mission from Marzanabad in Mazandaran to Ramiyan in Gorgan.

14 December: Ghafour Hasanpour and Mehdi Same' are arrested.

Around 30 December: Before the mountain team crosses into Gorgan, Safa'i-Farahani is ready to take his men back to the Siyahkal area and strike.

1971

13–19 January: Jalal Naqqash, Ebrahim Delafsordeh, Bijan Hirmanpour, and Kazem Salahi, associated with the P-A-M Group, are arrested in

Tehran.

18 January: General Siyavosh Behzadi gives an ultimatum to the students abroad to end their membership in the Confederation of Iranian Students by the first day of the Iranian New Year (21 March 1971), or face prosecution.

30 January: Safa'i-Farahani and his team conclude their second reconnaissance mission and are transported to the vicinity of Siyahkal in three cars.

30 January 1971: Ahmad Farhoudi, the representative of the P-A-M Group, joins Safa'i-Farahani's guerrillas. Safa'i-Farahani's team is now composed of nine fighters.

31 January – 2 February: Five key members of the H-A-S Group are arrested. Mohammad-Hadi Fazeli, Sho'ollah Moshayyedi, Esma'il Mo'ini-'Araqi, and Seyf Dalil-Safa'i, all members of the urban team, are arrested in Tehran. Eskandar Rahimi-Meschi, an important liaison person of the mountain team, is arrested at Fouman.

3 February: The Tabriz branch of the P-A-M Group carry out the first military operation of this group against Tabriz's Police Station number 5. The assault team is composed of 'Abdol-Manaf Falaki (team leader), Ja'far Ardebilchi, Mohammad Taqizadeh-Cheraqi, and Asghar 'Arab-Harisi.

4 February: Iraj Nayyeri, a second key liaison person of the mountain team is arrested at Siyahkal.

8 February: At 20:00, a seven-man team enter Siyahkal and five of them attack the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station.

9 February: The daily Keyhan reports an "Attack of armed men on the Siyahkal Gendarmerie Station".

18 February: At around 23:00, Safa'i-Farahani, Houshang Nayyeri, and Jalil Enferadi are subdued and arrested by villagers in a household at "Kolestan", one kilometre to the south of Lahijan.

21 February: At around 20:00, Mohammad-Rahim Sama'i, Ahmad

Farhoudi, 'Abbas Danesh-Behzadi, and Mehdi Eshaqi engage with the military. Sama'i and Eshaqi are killed, and Farhoudi is injured and arrested the next day. Danesh-Behzadi manages to escape but is arrested the next day on the road to Lahijan.

27 February: Mohaddes-Qandchi, the last of the Siyahkal guerrillas, is arrested at Eshkal, some sixteen kilometres away from Siyahkal.

17 March: At dawn, seven members of the mountain team and six members of the urban team are executed: Safa'i-Farahani, Enferadi, Houshang Nayyeri, Farhoudi, Bandehkhoda-Langaroudi, Mohaddes-Qandchi, Danesh-Behzadi, Hasanpour, Fazeli, Moshayyedi, Mo'ini-'Araqi, Dalil-Safa'i, and Rahimi-Meschi.

24 March: Keyhan and Ettela'at report on the Shah's message of gratitude to the families of the six martyred and the ten injured during the "Siyahkal event".

27 March: SAVAK raids the Engineering Faculty of Tehran University and rounds up three students charged with involvement in the Siyahkal strike.

3 April: At 23:30, a team of five composed of Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, Hasan Nowrouzi, Majid Ahmadzadeh, Khalil Salmasinejad, and 'Abdol-Manaf Falaki attack the Qolhak Police Station, expropriate a Uzi machine gun, firebomb police cars, and leave one policeman dead.

4 April: SAVAK's Ranking Security Official (maqam-e amniyati) presents the Siyahkal guerrillas as a communist-terrorist organization armed and financed by foreigners.

7 April: General Ziaeddin Farsiyoun, the Prosecutor General of the thirteen guerrillas executed on 17 March 1971, is attacked in front of his house in Tehran and dies on 11 April. The team which carries out the operation is composed of Eskandar Sadeqinejad (commander), Saffari-Ashtiyani, Hamid Ashraf, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, and Manouchehr Baha'ipour.

10 April: The regime announces a reward of 100,000 tomans for information leading to the arrest of Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, Hamid Ashraf, Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Javad Salahi, Rahmatollah Pirounaziri, Manouchehr Baha'ipour, 'Abbas Meftahi, Ahmad Zibrom, and Eskandar

Sadeqinejad.

13 April: The Financial Times reports on General Farsiyou's assassination and how "the Siah-Kal episode" "really shook up Tehran".

14 April: Clashes between students and the police at Tehran University result in the arrest of "about 250 students" and "an equal number injured".

15 April: At 00:30, while fixing announcements on the walls at Pamemar, around the Bazaar area, 'Ali-Reza Nabdel and Javad Salahi engage with the police. Salahi is shot dead and Nabdel is arrested. The announcements are about the birth of the People's Fada'i Guerrillas (Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq). Amir-Parviz Pouyan and Gholamreza Galavi also distribute these announcements.

27–29 April: Students at Tehran University's faculties of science, law, and literature demonstrate on the campus against arrests among students. They chant slogans against the Shah and the White Revolution.

April/May: Hamid Ashraf writes his One-Year Assessment of Urban and Rural Guerrilla Struggle.

1 May: Some four hundred to five hundred students demonstrate at Ariyamehr University of Technology. Intense skirmishes occur between students and the police. Riot police arrest some two hundred and injure an unknown number.

2 May: The University Guard is institutionalized. Police enter university campuses after students praise the Siyahkal guerrillas and the assassination of General Farsiyou.

5 May: A bomb explodes in the toilets of the Iran-America Cultural Centre at 23:30, causing extensive damage and destroying a telephone booth.

8 May: Majid Ahmadzadeh and Khalil Salmasinejad are injured while making Molotov cocktails. Majid survives but Salmasinejad succumbs and dies at Asia Hospital in Tehran.

10 May: The American Ambassador in Iran, Douglas MacArthur, reports that post-Siyahkal student demonstrations are worrisome.

13 May: A branch of the Melli Bank on Eisenhower Street in Tehran is attacked and expropriated by a team composed of Pouyan, Sadeqinejad, Tavakoli, Pirounaziri, Zibrom, and Ariyan. Ashraf Dehqani is arrested.

17 May: Amir-Parviz Pouyan, Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, 'Abbas Meftahi, Hamid Ashraf, and Eskandar Sadeqinejad participate in the first meeting of the leadership team of the newly constituted People's Fada'i Guerrillas in Tehran.

21 May: Behrooz Dehqani, member of the leadership team of the Tabriz branch of the Fada'is, is arrested by SAVAK after a gunfight. He was there to meet Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, a mathematics graduate of Tehran University, whom he had met in a village in Tabriz, where they both taught in the "educational corps". Behrooz Dehqani is killed under torture on 29 May 1971.

22–23 May: Hamid Tavakoli and Asghar 'Arab-Harisi are arrested.

24 May: After the arrest of Behrooz Dehqani and Hamid Tavakoli, Pouyan and Rahmatollah Pirounaziri are surrounded at their safe house in Tehran and killed in a gun battle.

24 May: While moving to a safe house on Tavousi Street, Sadeqinejad is killed in a gun battle and Sa'id Ariyan, a member of the Mashhad branch, and his wife, Shahin Tavakoli, are both arrested.

End of May: The new leadership of the Fada'is is composed of Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh, 'Abbas Meftahi, and Hamid Ashraf.

May/June: Mas'oud Ahmadzadeh leads two teams. The first team is composed of Falaki, Asadollah Meftahi, Zibrom, and Roqiyeh Daneshgary. 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari and Hasan Sarkari later join this team. The second team is composed of 'Abdolkarim Hajiyan-Sehpoleh, Majid Ahmadzadeh, and Hasan Nowrouzi.

May/June: Hamid Ashraf leads a team composed of Saffari-Ashtiyani, Changiz Qobadi, Bahram Qobadi, Baha'ipour, and Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan.

May/June: 'Abbas Meftahi takes charge of the Tabriz branch, and Mohammad-Taqi Afshani-Naqadeh becomes the liaison person between the Tabriz team and

‘Abbas Meftahi in Tehran. The Tabriz team is composed of Akbar Mo‘ayyed, Yahya Aminnia, ‘Ali Tavasoli, Hasan Ja‘fari, Ja‘far Najafi, Abolfazl Nayyerizadeh, Ahmad Ahmadi, and Oranous Pourhasan.

June/July: Oranous Pourhasan leaves his Fada’i safe house without informing his comrades. Hamid Ashraf suggests sending a team to Tabriz to “execute” the traitor, but Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh disagrees.

22 July: Asadollah Meftahi and ‘Abdol-Manaf Falaki, accompanied by Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh, attack and expropriate the Saderat Bank in Tehran.

24 July: Gendarmes at Nowshahr become suspicious of Changiz Qobadi, Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan, Bahram Qobadi, and Mohammad-‘Ali Partovi. Under arrest, and accompanied by two SAVAK personnel, they are dispatched to SAVAK headquarters. On their way, Changiz Qobadi provokes an accident. Bahram Qobadi and Partovi are arrested, while Changiz Qobadi and Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan escape.

26 July: One day after the arrest of Falaki on 25 July, Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh is arrested on Mowlavi Street, where he is scheduled to meet Falaki.

28 July: After the arrest of Mas‘oud Ahmadzadeh, the new provisional leadership team of the Fada’is is composed of Majid Ahmadzadeh, ‘Abbas Meftahi, and Hamid Ashraf.

12 August: A team of four, composed of Hamid Ashraf (leader), ‘Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, Ahmad Zibrom, and Hasan Sarkari, attack and expropriate the Melli Bank on Mirdamad Street, then attack and rob the Melli Bank on Zafar street.

15 August: ‘Abbas Meftahi is arrested when he goes to meet Akbar Mo‘ayyed who was arrested beforehand.

Around 24 August: Majid Ahmadzadeh is arrested as he goes to a meeting with Ebrahim Sarvazad, who had been previously arrested. A SAVAK agent and Sarvazad are said to have been killed when Ahmadzadeh attempts to blow himself up with a grenade.

26 August: A bomb explodes in the NITV (National Iranian Television)

office of Shiraz, coinciding with the Shiraz Art Festival.

Around 26 August: After the arrest of Majid Ahmadzadeh and 'Abbas Meftahi, discussions about the current situation of the Fada'is are conducted by Hamid Ashraf, Hasan Nowrouzi, Asadollah Meftahi, and Changiz Qobadi.

August/September: At 'Eshratabad prison, Bijan Jazani writes What a Revolutionary Should Know. This work is published in London, in February or March 1972, under Safa'i-Farahani's name.

9 September: At around midnight, a safe house at Shahr-e Shahpour, with four guerrillas in it, is surrounded and attacked. Comrade X had been arrested earlier in the evening of 8 September and had divulged the address of the safe house. Syrus Sepehri is injured, arrested, and killed under torture. The other two guerrillas escape.

9 September: Hamid Ashraf and Hasan Nowrouzi are identified in the Shahr-e Shahpour area and engage in a gunfight with units of SAVAK and gendarmerie. Both escape but Nowrouzi is injured. Nowrouzi is treated by Changiz Qobadi. Gholamreza Galavi leaves their safe house on Mehrabad Jonoubi to buy medicine and is arrested.

10 September: At around 00:30, the safe house on Mehrabad Jonoubi is attacked by units of SAVAK and the police. Saffari-Ashtiyani, Nowrouzi, and Ashraf escape.

10 September: At 13:00, Hamid Ashraf and another comrade explode a bomb at the Moniriyeh Police Station (pasgah-e police-e rahnama'i va ranandehghi).

12 September: Asadollah Meftahi is arrested at 20:30 while attending a meeting with Yahya Ghaninejad.

30 September: At 05:00, the safe house at Shahrak-e Vali'ahd on Seh Rah-e Azari is surrounded by the police and SAVAK. Changiz Qobadi, the team leader, Hoseyn Seyyed-Nowzadi, and Mohammad-'Ali Salemi are killed, and Sakineh Ja'fari is arrested. 'Abdolrahim Sabouri is separately arrested later.

3 October: At 05:00, the safe house on Abtahi Street is surrounded by some fifty police and SAVAK personnel. Jamshidi-Roudbari, the team leader, escapes. Manouchehr Baha'ipour and Mehrnoush Ebrahimi-Rowshan are killed. Ahmad-Reza Sho'a'i-Na'ini is arrested.

5 October: At around 12:00, a team of three guerrillas, including Hamid Ashraf, engage with an armed police patrol at the junction of Babayan and Amiri Street. 'Abdolhoseyn Barati is killed, but the other guerrillas escape, leaving behind one dead policeman, one wounded policeman and two wounded civilians.

10 October: A Sunday Times article entitled "Guerrillas at Shah's feast?" states that "Menace lurks behind the jollity" and "the celebrations have been threatened by Che Guevara-style insurgents who have attempted to terrorize Iran in the past six months."

15 October: Protesting the Shah's lavish 2,500-year festivities, some 250 students demonstrate in front of the Iranian Consulate General in San Francisco. They blow up the Consulate General building with some 120 sticks of dynamite.

16 October: During the Shah's celebration of the 2,500-year anniversary, two electricity pylons are blown up by Hamid Ashraf and Shahrokh Hedayati. The damage is not enough to cut Tehran's electricity supply.

16 October: Another electricity pylon, at the Farahabad Electricity Plant in Tehran, is blown up by a team composed of Hamid Ashraf and three others.

19 October: The safe house at Darakeh (Evin), with 'Ali-Naqi Arash, Shahrokh Hedayati, Hamid Ashraf, and Jamshidi-Roudbari, is surrounded by a large number of gendarmes and SAVAK agents. This occurs after the arrest of 'Ali-Naqi Arash on the same day. Shahrokh Hedayati is killed.

25 October: The Fada'is have lost about ninety percent of their fighters and are on the verge of complete collapse. Only two guerrilla teams of four fighters each remain intact. Hamid Ashraf commands a team composed of Saffari-Ashtiyani, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, and Shirin Mo'azed. Hasan Nowrouzi commands a second team composed of Ahmad Zibrom, Farrokh Sepehri, and 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari.

November: The Saderat Bank at Samangan (Narmak) is attacked under the command of Hasan Nowrouzi. The team is composed of Ahmad Zibrom, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, Farrokh Sepehri, and 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari.

1972

9 January: At around 18:00, a team of six attack and expropriate the Safaviyeh branch of the Melli Bank on Entesariyeh Street. The team is composed of Hamid Ashraf, Hasan Nowrouzi, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, Farrokh Sepehri, and 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari.

12 January: The press reports on the identity of the assailants at the Safaviyeh branch of the Melli Bank. SAVAK falsely claims that Shahrokh Hedayati, who had been killed on 19 October 1971, was one of the participants.

17 January: Within an hour, two bombs are detonated: at 20:00, behind the American Embassy, and at 21:00 at the Iran-America Cultural Centre. The explosions leave the guards injured and cause damage to the buildings. The first bombing is carried out by Hasan Nowrouzi and Ahmad Zibrom and the second is carried out by Mohammad-'Ali Partovi and Shirin Mo'azed.

24 January: The Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee (komiteh-ye moshtarak-e zedd-e kharabkari) is established to pool and coordinate the forces of SAVAK, the National Police, and the Gendarmerie to uproot all urban guerrillas.

3 February: Dressed as workers of the National Water Company, a team of six expropriate a money truck belonging to the Bazargani Bank. One policeman is shot dead. The team is led by Hamid Ashraf and is composed of Hasan Nowrouzi, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, Ahmad Zibrom, and 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari. The guerrillas walk away with 260,000 tomans.

29 February: Government-organized demonstrators in Tehran and the provinces come out in support of national unity and the Shah and in opposition to “foreign mercenaries”. The “Pouyan Brigade”, under the command of Hasan Nowrouzi, detonates three bombs at Sepah Square. Five people are injured, and according to the Iranian press one is killed.

1 March: At dawn, six key members of the Fada’is are executed at Chitgar: Mas’oud and Majid Ahmadzadeh, ‘Abbas and Asadollah Meftahi, Hamid Tavakoli and Gholamreza Galavi, members of the Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Sari branches of the old P-A-M Group and the new Fada’is.

2 March: At dawn, four other key members of the Fada’iyan are executed at Chitgar: Bahman Ajang, Sa’id Ariyan, ‘Abdolkarim Hajiyan-Sehpoleh, and Mehdi Sovalouni, members of the Tehran and Mashhad branches of the old P-A-M Group and the new Fada’is.

7 March: Students of Tehran University’s Faculty of Engineering begin an on-campus demonstration protesting the execution of ten Fada’is. By the morning of 8 March, the number of protesting students reaches six hundred.

12 March: At dawn, ‘Abdol-Manaf Falaki-Tabrizi, Ja’far Ardebilchi, Mohammad Taqizadeh-Cheraqi, Asghar ‘Arab-Harisi, Akbar Mo’ayyed, ‘Ali-Reza Nabdell, Yahya Aminnia, Hasan Sarkari, and ‘Ali-Naqi Arash are executed at Chitgar. Most of the nine belonged to the Tabriz branch of the old P-A-M Group and the new Fada’is.

24 May: A bomb is detonated at Meydan Shah in Tehran, killing a policeman. This is probably a Mojahedin operation.

25 May: Mohammad Hanifnejad, ‘Abdolrasoul Meshkinfam, Asghar Badi’zadegan, Mohammad ‘Asgarizadeh, and Sa’id Mohsen, the founders of the Mojahedin guerrillas, are executed.

30–31 May: The British Ambassador, Peter Ramsbotham, reports that during President Nixon’s visit, “at least 10 bombs exploded in two days ... These bombs showed a degree of timing and organization that we had not previously seen.”

31 May: President Richard Nixon’s motorcade is pelted with stones as it

passes by Tehran University's main dormitory.

May/ June: Faramarz Sharifi and Nasrin Mo'azed detonate a bomb at the Iranian Oil Company.

16 July: At 06:30, 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari is wounded and arrested. He was pursuing a patrol car of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee on his motorbike. The press, under orders from SAVAK, declares him dead.

16 July: Jamshidi-Roudbari's disappearance forces the rapid evacuation of his safe house. While transporting handmade grenades on his Honda 90, Hamid Ashraf is wounded in the leg when the hand grenades explode. He escapes and meets Saffari-Ashtiyani two hours later.

24 July: After the arrest of Jamshidi-Roudbari, the safe house of Hamid Ashraf, Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani, and Shirin Mo'azed at Soleymaniyeh Street is surrounded at 14:30 by four teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Mohammad Saffari-Ashtiyani is killed. Shirin Mo'azed, who had been wounded in the gunfight, and Hamid Ashraf, who had been wounded eight days before, manage to escape. Shirin Mo'azed writes a report of this day. In it, she refers to several occasions when she was aided in her getaway by the general public.

24 July: The documents discovered in the Soleymaniyeh safe house indicate the extent to which the guerrillas had successfully identified, profiled, and documented the trajectories, addresses, phone numbers, and licence plates of military and governmental officials and foreign diplomats in Iran.

29 July: At 17:30, a safe house at 25 Shahrivar Street is surrounded by members of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Farrokh Sepehri, Faramarz Sharifi, and Reza Fazilat-kalam are killed in gun battles. One police captain is injured.

10 August: Joseph Farland, the American Ambassador, gives a detailed report of guerrilla operations since April 1972. He accounts for twenty-eight confirmed explosions, ten shoot-outs, and several other incidents, adding that there are "other unconfirmed incidents reported on [an] almost daily basis".

12 August: The Guardian writes, "the guerrillas are nevertheless, in part,

the perverse manifestation of legitimate discontents.” This article, “Graft, Violence, and Good Intentions”, infuriates the Shah.

13 August: The Chief Warden of Tehran Prisons, Brigadier General Taheri, is assassinated by the Mojahedin.

15 August: A bomb explodes in front of one of the offices of the National Iranian Oil Company, killing one person. This is probably a Mojahedin operation.

19 August: At 05:00, police become suspicious of a motorcyclist at the Khaniabad Junction. Ahmad Zibrom, who is carrying a time bomb, engages with the police. Zibrom abandons his motorbike and takes flight while exchanging gunfire with the police. He is eventually surrounded by three teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee and is killed.

7 September: The nineteen-year-old Mehdi Reza’i of the Mojahedin is executed.

September/December: New recruits, new teams, and the spread of guerrilla teams in the provinces. Hamid Ashraf is the only thread weaving through the past and present of the Fada’i history.

September: Ebrahim Pourreza’i-Khaliq and Esma’il Khakpour are dispatched to Mashhad to form a team under the command of ‘Ali-Akbar Ja’fari.

3 October: Mehdi Zar’iyan and Reza Towfiqi are arrested in Ahvaz by a unit of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee.

22 October: Hamid Ashraf escapes units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee at the Khaniabad Bridge. A SAVAK authority laments that months of surveillance and effort came to naught.

12–15 November: At the Shahr bani Provisional Prison, Jazani speaks about the symptoms of leftism (chapravi) in the armed struggle movement. He advocates the use of political forms of struggle as the “second leg” of the revolutionary movement.

15 November: Jazani is transferred to wing number three of Qasr prison.

28 November: Asadollah Bashardoust, is killed by an Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee team dispatched to Esfahan.

November/December: Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran goes underground and is admitted to the Fada'i ranks. Her network joining the Fada'is includes Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, her brother, Hamid Mo'meni, and Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki.

1972: There are contacts and discussions between the Fada'iyān and the Mojahedin. Hamid Ashraf meets with Reza Reza'i and there are plans for cooperation between the two guerrilla organizations.

1973

9 January: Joseph Farland, the American Ambassador, notes: "Perhaps the group most thoroughly opposed to the Shah and his regime are students, inside and outside Iran, and the terrorists for whom they provide a fertile field for recruitment."

23 January: Poursan Yadollahi, a chemistry student at Tehran University, and Behrooz 'Abdi, a student at the Ariyamehr University of Technology, are killed in an explosion at a house on Khajeh Rabi' street in Mashhad. The two new members of the Fada'i guerrillas were probably producing explosives.

February: Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki and 'Ali-Reza Shahab-Razavi, under the supervision of Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, enter a safe house on Hesamolsaltaneh Street in Tehran. This is a propaganda team responsible for distributing pamphlets and declarations. Ashraf frequents their safe house to train the team on the use of arms.

February/March: Bijan Jazani writes *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*. The date is approximative and could be anywhere from January to September 1973.

February/March: Bijan Jazani questions Ahmadzadeh's line of thought on the role of armed struggle.

19 March: Joseph Farland reports on the “continuing widespread student unrest in Iran”. He speaks of three weeks of demonstrations across Iran sometimes accompanied by violence on the part of students and affecting “virtually every major college, university or technical training school in the country”.

19 March: Demonstrations marking the anniversary of Siyahkal at Ariyamehr University of Technology are reported to result in the arrest of thirty students. At Tabriz University, some two hundred students are reported injured, and according to unconfirmed accounts between three and eleven students are killed.

25 March: Ashraf Dehqani escapes from Qasr prison with the help of Mojahedin prisoners.

April: Mostafa Madani is released from Qasr prison. He informs Hamid Ashraf that Bijan Jazani wants him to leave the country. Ashraf ignores Jazani’s message.

April/May: Two teams in Shahi and Babolsar join the Fada’is. One team is led by ‘Abbas Kaboli and the other by Mohammad Hormatipour.

24 May: Nasiri and his strongmen monopolize all security-related issues in the hands of SAVAK. The Shah decides to place the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee under the supervision and control of SAVAK. A policy of “zero tolerance” is adopted.

May/June: A ‘zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran goes underground and joins a safe house occupied by Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran and Hamid Mo’meni.

June: For a short period Mostafa Sho‘a‘iyan becomes organizationally involved with the Fada’is. The circle around Sho‘a‘iyan, composed of Fatemeh Sa‘idi, Naser (around ten years old) and Arjang (around eleven years old) Shaygan-Shamasbi, Marziyeh Ahmadi-Oskou’i, and Saba Bijanzadeh, join the Fada’is, but Sho‘a‘iyan does not.

July: Hamid Ashraf writes the introduction to Ashraf Dehqani’s work *The Epic of Resistance*. In this piece he reminds distant observers that “those who were present in the movement had seen with their own eyes how in the process of struggle iron was forged.”

24 August: On their return from Palestine, Iraj Sepehri (Farrokh Sepehri's brother) and Mohammad Hormatipour are identified in Abadan. Iraj Sepehri detonates a grenade and commits suicide, while Hormatipour escapes. Both Sepehri and Hormatipour were ranking officers in Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command.

27 September: The Shah announces, "Today, we can no longer talk about urban guerrillas or terrorist groups, since this topic is way too childish and ridiculous. Now, this situation has come to an end, and there is no longer any news of it."

27 September: A news blackout on guerrilla activities is imposed to spare embarrassment to the Shah, who had claimed that guerrilla activities were over.

2 October: The Iranian press report on the arrest of twelve on charges of plotting to kidnap and assassinate the Shah, the Queen, and the Crown Prince. The twelve are identified as Teyfour Batha'i, Khosrow Golesorkhi, Manouchehr Moqaddam-Salimi, Keramatollah Daneshiyan, 'Abbas Samakar, Reza 'Allamehzadeh, Iraj Jamshidi, Ebrahim Farhang-Razi, Shokouh Mirzadegi (Farhang), Maryam Ettehadieh, Morteza Siyahpoush, and Farhad Qeysari.

3 November: A new wave of demonstrations and protests against the trial of the twelve erupts at the Engineering Faculty of Tehran University.

October to December: At Qasr prison, there is a clear and hostile line-up between the followers of Jazani and those of Ahmadzadeh.

17 December: Some two hundred students start a demonstration from Tehran's Polytechnic University towards Ariyamehr University of Technology.

December 1973/January 1974: Hamid Ashraf writes Three-Year Assessment (Jam'bandi-e seh saleh). This is an incomplete survey of the guerrillas' achievements and shortcomings since the launching of armed struggle.

9 January: Hasan Nowrouzi, while travelling in Lorestan, is reported to the Chaman Soltan Gendarmerie Station. Surrounded and disarmed, he takes his own life by swallowing a cyanide pill.

24 January: The press reports that the appellate court has condemned to death Khosrow Golesorkhi, Keramatollah Daneshiyan, Teyfour Batha'i, Mohammad-Reza 'Allamehzadeh, and 'Abbas Samakar.

26 January: Protesting the trial and sentencing of Golesorkhi, Daneshiyan, and their co-defendants, students at the University of Tehran go on an unprecedented offensive. Tehran University is closed while high school students join the protests. Slogans support the five condemned and the armed struggle movement.

January/February: Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran leads a team living in a safe house at Jouy-e Mardabad in Karaj. Its members include A'zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran and Martik Qazariyan. Hamid Ashraf frequents this safe house. This team is involved with planning Mohammad-Sadeq Fateh-Yazdi's assassination and the bombing of the gendarmerie station at Karvansara-Sangi.

January/February: The first issue of Nabard-e Khalq (People's Combat), the official organ of the Fada'i Organization, is published by Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, A'zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, and Martik Qazariyan.

6 February: Yousef Zarkari, a twenty-one-year-old railroad worker recruited by Hamid Ashraf, is identified in Esfahan and killed in a gun battle.

9 February: The central headquarters of the gendarmerie in Tehran is rocked by three explosions carried out by the Fada'is. The bombs cause extensive damage.

14 February: Fatemeh Sa'idi is arrested in Mashhad. She is forty-five and the mother of the Fada'i Nader Shaygan-Shamasbi (killed on 26 May 1973) and Arjang and Naser Shaygan-Shamasbi.

18 February: At dawn, Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan are executed at Chitgar. At the last minute, the other three co-defendants sentenced to death are

pardoned.

22 February: After the execution of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan, student unrest begins at Esfahan University and spreads to Tabriz and Tehran universities.

1 March: During Sultan Qabous's (ruler of Oman) visit to Tehran, the Fada'is bomb the Omani Embassy, the central office of BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation), and the central office of the Shell Oil Company in Tehran.

8 March: Protesting the execution of Golesorkhi and Daneshiyan, members of CISNU occupy Iranian Embassies in Brussels, Stockholm, and The Hague. The Western press reports on the student occupations and their political demands.

13 March: Jalal Fatahi and Esma'il Khakpour, members of the Mashhad branch, are arrested near the village of Ebrahimabad.

15 March: Ebrahim Pourreza'i-Khaliq is arrested in Mashhad by a team of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. He is killed under torture on 17 March 1974.

20 March: The British Embassy in Tehran reports that "the U.S. Embassy in Tehran received a letter from the Cherikha [Fada'is] threatening to murder four Americans for every Iranian executed."

18 April: A logistical team of Fada'is in Tabriz is identified and two teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee arrest Ebrahim and Behjat Mahjoubi-Namin, Yousef Keshizadeh, and Farzad Karimi.

26 April: Marziyeh Ahmadi-Oskou'i, a poet and a teacher who had joined the Fada'is in March 1973, is killed in a gun battle in Tehran. Shirin Mo'azed, a member of Hamid Ashraf's team since October 1971 is arrested on the same day and is killed under torture. Marziyeh Ahmadi-Oskou'i, Shirin Mo'azed, Ashraf Dehqani, and Hamid Ashraf had lived in the same safe house in Tehran.

April/May: The Fada'i leadership team (markaziyat) is composed of Hamid Ashraf, 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari, Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-

Ahangaran, Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz, Mohammad-Reza Yasrebi, and Nastaran Al-e Aqa. Behrooz Armaghani joins the leadership team around December 1974.

May: Saba Bijanzadeh leads a team at a safe house in Mashhad. Her team members include Hamid Mo'meni and Abolhasan Shaygan-Shamasbi.

Spring: The People's Fada'i Guerrillas write an official response to the observations and analysis of the Star Group (Gorouh-e setareh). It contains important information concerning the outlook of the Fada'is on the proper method of struggle.

8 June: 'Ali-Reza Shahab-Razavi is arrested and dies under torture on 16 June 1974.

August: Ashraf Dehqani, 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari, Abolhasan Shaygan-Shamasbi, and Kiyoumars Sanjari live in a safe house in Mashhad.

August: Nastaran Al-e Aqa, Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, and 'Abbas Kaboli live in a safe house in Ahvaz.

4 August: It is suspected that SAVAK secretly executes 'Abbas Jamshidi-Roudbari, who was arrested on 16 July 1972.

11 August: Mohammad-Sadeq Fateh-Yazdi is assassinated by a team of four or five led by Khashayar Sanjari and including Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, and Fathali Panahiyan. Fateh-Yazdi was a prominent industrialist.

25 August: The British Embassy reports hearsay that four bombs were discovered and defused at the office of Ja'far Sharif-Emami, the President of the Senate.

August: It is most likely that 'Abbas Kaboli, Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, and Nastaran Al-e Aqa attack and steal 250,000 tomans from a company on the Andimeshk-Ahvaz road. This is the last known robbery by the Fada'is.

6 September: 'Abbas Kaboli dies in an explosion at his safe house in Ahvaz while preparing explosives.

16 September: Hasan-Jan Langouri raises the suspicion of a unit of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee on Kourosh Street in Tehran. Langouri opens fire and is killed in the gunfight. At the time he lived in a safe house with Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, Sediqeh Gharavi, and Naser Shaygan-Shamasbi, and a girl whose alias was “Mehrnoush”.

Late September: Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, Behrooz Armaghani, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki, and Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran move into a safe house on Coca-Cola Street in Tehran. Armaghani and Sadiqi-Pashaki are in their training period.

Around October: The historical part two of Bijan Jazani’s “Draft of the Sociology and Strategical Foundations of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement” is taught by Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki in a safe house in Tehran.

14 October: Newsweek publishes an article called “Quiet... SAVAK May Be Listening”. In this article Edward Behr reports on the repressive measures and methods of torture employed by SAVAK.

6 December: The Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee begins a systematic campaign of door-to-door house searches in the south-eastern neighbourhoods of Tehran searching for urban guerrillas. The searches begin at 22:30, carried out by approximately twenty units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee or some hundred members of SAVAK and police. Without warrants, houses are thoroughly inspected, and identity cards of residents are checked.

30 December: At 07:15, in an operation called “Behrooz Dehqani”, Major ‘Ali-Naqi Niktab’ is assassinated by a team led by Nastaran Al-e Aqa and including Khashayar Sanjari, Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, and Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran. The assassination takes place on Matin-Daftari Street, close to the Prime Minister’s Office, the Marble Palace, and three embassies. The guerrillas attach a bomb to the car in which he was assassinated, in the hope that it will detonate later when the car is transported to the headquarters of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Niktab’ was a SAVAK interrogator and was said to have been responsible for the torture of Behrooz and Ashraf Dehqani.

1975

8 January: The 16th Congress of CISNU (Confederation of Iranian Students National Unity) begins with two messages of solidarity sent by the Fada'i and Mojahedin guerrillas. CISNU promises to "keep hoisted the Fada'is' brave flag of struggle".

15 January: The 16th Congress of CISNU adopts a new Charter, finalizing its adherence to the overthrow of the regime. It fully aligns its objectives with those of the guerrilla movement in Iran.

19 January: The Sunday Times publishes "Torture in Iran", a detailed special report on SAVAK's methods of dealing with dissidents in Iran.

Around January: Mohammad Ma'soumkhani, Farzad Dadgar, Abdolmajid Pirzadeh-Jahromi, and Touraj Heydari-Beygvand join the Fada'is and live under the supervision of Mohammad-Reza Yasrebi in a safe house in the Narmak neighbourhood.

January/February: An educational team composed of A'zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, Khashayar Sanjari, 'Ali Dabiri-Fard, and Hoseyn Allahyari is formed in Karaj. This team is different from the one at Jouy-e Darabad. Allahyari is a student at the Engineering Faculty of Tehran University and has already studied Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh's treatises. Hamid Ashraf frequents this safe house.

January/February: Bijan Jazani writes *The Most Pressing Problems of Our Revolutionary Movement at This Moment*. This work comes to be commonly known as *Combatting the Shah's Dictatorship, the People's Principal Enemy and the Gendarme of Imperialism*. This date is approximative as this text was written and rewritten several times in prison and finalized somewhere between the end of fall 1974 and the beginning of winter 1975.

February/March: Jazani speaks about armed struggle as a tactic among several others. He argues that two incompatible ways of thought exist within the Fada'i movement.

8 February: At 19:30, Khorasan's Provincial Headquarters is blown up.

8 February: At 20:30, Babol's Police Headquarters is blown up.

8 February: Soleymanieh Gendarmerie Station is blown up at 21:10. The team carrying out the operation is composed of Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran (team leader), Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, Behrooz Armaghani, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki, and Ayoub Movahedipour.

8 February: Lahijan Gendarmerie Station is blown up at 22:00.

14 February: Sa'id Payan, member of a team of four in Ahvaz, is gravely wounded after his grenade explodes. SAVAK maintains that after he was taken to hospital, for some unknown reason, he was shot by his own comrades, who fled the scene.

Around 20 February: Under the supervision of 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari, the branch leader of the Fada'i forces in the North of Iran, Qorbanali 'Abdolrahimpour, Shahrzad (Golrokh) Mahdavi, and Mehdi Forqani establish the first safe house in Rasht.

2 March: The Shah announces the end of the multiparty system and the creation of the Rastakhiz or Resurgence Party.

3 March: In an operation called "Majid Ahmadzadeh", Captain Yadollah Nowrouzi, the commander of the University Guards at the Ariyamehr University of Technology, is assassinated at 06:50 outside his home in Narmak, Tehran. Mohammad-Reza Yasrebi participated in this operation.

4 March: Jazani confides in five of his close comrades that armed struggle is only necessary if it can further the cause of political and trade union or guild activities. Short of that, Jazani rules that armed struggle is not only unnecessary but harmful.

5 March: 'Abbas-'Ali Shahryari is assassinated on Parcham Street. He had been the chief of the Tudeh Party's Tehran Organization and a SAVAK informant responsible for the arrest of Mohammad-Majid Kianzad, Sa'id Kalantari, and Mohammad Choupanzadeh. The team carrying out the "Khosrow Rouzbeh" operation at 07:40 is composed of Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran (team leader), Behrooz Armaghani, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki, Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, and Ahmad (alias).

16 March: The New York Times publishes an article entitled “Repression in Iran” and claims that “Iranians to whom all possibility of freedom of expression and cultural identity is denied have no other choice but to resort to armed resistance, which explains the tragic violence in today’s Iran.”

17 March: Brigadier General Reza Zandipour, the second head of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee, is assassinated by the Mojahedin.

18 March: Two SAVAK headquarters are bombed. The first explosion is at Meykadeh Street and the other at Firouz Street near the Senate building.

6 April: Mohammad Ma’soumkhani is arrested and SAVAK maintains that he was a member of Captain Nowrouzi’s assassination team.

Around 6 April: Hoseyn Allahyari is accidentally shot and dies during training. Khashayar Sanjari is said to have been reprimanded for negligence in this event.

13 April: A newly found safe house in Qazvin is surrounded by teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Khashayar Sanjari is killed in a gun battle and Anoushiravan Lotfi, Mahmoud Namazi, and Mansour Farshidi, all three students of the Engineering Faculty of Tehran University, are arrested. Mahmoud Namazi and Mansour Farshidi are executed in prison.

18 April: The extrajudicial execution of nine high-profile political prisoners serving their terms: Bijan Jazani, Hasan Zia-Zarifi, ‘Abbas Sourki, Sa’id Kalantari, ‘Aziz Sarmadi, Ahmad Jalil-Afshar, Mohammad Choupanzadeh, Kazem Zolanvar (Zolanvary), and Mostafa Javan-Khoshdel. Under orders from SAVAK, the press reports that they were killed while attempting to escape.

21 April: At 04:00, ‘Ali-Akbar Ja’fari dies in a car accident as he is driving towards Mashhad. He was accompanied by Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz, who survived. Ja’fari was recruited by ‘Abdol-Manaf Falaki and ‘Abdolhoseyn Barati while he was studying economics at Tehran University. At the time of his death, ‘Ali-Akbar Ja’fari lived in a safe house in Mashhad and was one of the leadership team (markaziyat) of the Fada’is. Those in his hideout included Abolhasan Shaygan-Shamasbi, Ahmad Gholamiyan-Langaroudi, Kiyoumars Sanjari, and Saba Bijanzadeh.

29 April: Twenty-one Iranian students occupy the Iranian Embassy in London, where they protest the deaths of nine political prisoners as well as the ill treatment, torture, and killing of numerous other political prisoners.

April/May: The sixth issue of People's Combat publishes an article by Jazani for the first time. The writing emphasized the importance of armed struggle as the primary responsibility of the People's Fada'i Guerrillas, but argued that the organization needed to move beyond and prepare for the mass revolutionary movement by aiding the working-class movement.

May: Gholamreza Mo'azenipour and Mahnaz Sadiq-Tonokaboni, under the command of Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, are dispatched to Babol. Gholamreza Mo'azenipour was recruited by Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, and Mahnaz Sadiq-Tonokaboni was recruited by 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari.

7 May: Habib Mo'meni, a member of Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran's team in Jouy-e Mardabad at Karaj, is frisked on the streets. He resists, is wounded in a shoot-out that ensues, and is arrested. He dies two days later in custody.

21 May: Ebrahim Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i is assassinated by a team of Fada'is. The Iranian press claim that his assailants are Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran and Martik Qazariyan. It is also said that Ali-Asghar (Bahman) Rouhi-Ahangaran was responsible for this operation. Noshirvanpour-Chaboksara'i was an ex-Fada'i who recanted after his arrest and participated in a radio and television programme in April 1972.

28 June: At 07:00, the safe house in the Dowlatabad neighbourhood of Karaj is attacked by four units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. The members of the team at this safe house under the command of Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran were Martik Qazariyan, A'zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, Yadollah Zare'-Karizi, and Mahmoud 'Azimi-Bolouriyan. In the long gunfight that ensues, Nezhatolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran, Martik Qazariyan, Yadollah Zare'-Karizi, and Mahmoud 'Azimi-Bolouriyan are killed, and A'zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran is arrested. A SAVAK operative, 'Ali-Asghar Afshar, is also killed.

11 July: 'Abdollah Sa'idi-Beydokhti, the commander of a Fada'i team in Gorgan, is attacked by the police while he is asleep in a minibus. He dies

after swallowing a cyanide pill. His team was preparing two assassinations.

July/August: A new team is constituted in Sari. Its members are Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki, Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, Mostafa Hasanpour, 'Ali-Reza Rahimi-'Aliabadi, and Fatemeh (Shamsi) Naha'i.

August: Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki and Mostafa Hasanpour go to Gorgan and constitute an educational team. Later Pari (alias), Masrour Farhang, and Yousef Qane'-Khoshkebijari join them. This team is under the command of Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki.

September: On instructions from Behrooz Armaghani, 'Abdolreza Kalantar-Neystanaki rents a safe house in Tehran's Akbarabad neighbourhood. Saba Bijanzadeh is in command and Hamid-Reza Hezarkhani and Maliheh Zohtab live in this house.

21 November: A unit of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee becomes suspicious of a young man at the junction of Navab in Tehran. The subject, 'Ali Dabiri-Fard, fires on the security personnel and is killed in the gunfight.

1976

7 January: Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran, a key organizer and operational leader of the Fada'is and commander of the Fada'i forces in the North of Iran (Sari, Gorgan and Amol), is accidentally identified by a SAVAK informer, Ahmad-Reza Karimi, during routine patrols in the streets of Tehran. Two units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee arrest Bahman Rouhi-Ahangaran before he can use his grenade or cyanide pill. After extensive torture, he goes into a coma and dies in prison on 13 January 1976.

8 January: In Gorgan, a Fada'i safe house is attacked by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee at around 14:00. Masrour Farhang is killed in the gun battle, while Yousef Qane'-Khoshkebijari and Sheyda Nabavi

escape to Gonbad.

9 January: At 22:20, the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee surrounds the safe house at Amol. In a long gun battle, Fatemeh Hasanpour (Ghafour Hasanpour's sister) is killed and 'Ali-Reza Rahimi-'Aliabadi manages to escape to Babol.

9 January: In Sari, Zahra Aqanabi-Qolhaki, a member of the Fada'i leadership, is arrested. Mostafa Hasanpour (Ghafour Hasanpour's brother) escapes the safe house.

11 January: Fatemeh (Shamsi) Naha'i is killed at Vali'ahd Square in Sari. She was a student at Tehran University's Faculty of Literature.

23 January: Fathali Panahiyan is killed by two teams of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee on his way to meet a potential recruit who was a SAVAK informant. In the shoot-out, Panahiyan kills one SAVAK member, Parviz Khodayari, and injures another.

26 January: At 07:00, in the Maralan (Ghiyas) neighbourhood of Tabriz, a Fada'i safe house is attacked. Fatemeh Afdarnia, Mas'oud Parvaresh, Ja'far Mohtashami, Majid Pirzad-Jahromi, and Mostafa Daqiqi-Hamedani are killed.

29 January: Some twenty students occupy the Iranian Radio and Television building in Paris for some three hours.

31 January: A Molotov cocktail is hurled at the Iran Air building on the Champs-Élysées, causing damage but no casualties.

3 February: At 07:45, a team of guerrillas composed of Ahmad Gholamiyan-Langaroudi and Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz assassinate Hoseyn Nahidi, the chief interrogator of Mashhad's SAVAK.

12 February: Hamid Mo'meni, a second-generation theorist of the Fada'i, is killed in a gun battle as he enters the compromised house of Kamal Pouladi, in Tehran's Majidiyeh neighbourhood. Kamal Pouladi was arrested on 8 February 1976.

13 February: At 20:45, the governor's headquarters at Roudsar is bombed

by a Fada'i guerrilla unit. The residents were informed in advance by telephone calls to evacuate the building. The bomb caused no casualties.

1 May: SAVAK reports on the distribution of Bijan Jazani's pamphlet, *How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Struggle*, at Tehran University's Faculty of Engineering. The handwritten manifesto has the signature of the Fada'i Organization.

2 May: Maryam Shahi and Hadi Farjad explode a bomb in Khorasan's Office of Labour and Social Affairs. Telephone calls from the Fada'is warn that a bomb will explode in the building and all employees are evacuated. According to the Fada'is, a member of SAVAK personnel seeks the help of an employee to neutralize the bomb. The bomb explodes at 10:30 killing them both.

16 May: At 02:00, several units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee surround a safe house at No. 8 Khayam Street in the Tehran-No neighbourhood, looking for Hamid Ashraf. In a long gun battle, Ladan Al-e Aqa, Mahvash Hatami, Farhad Sadiqi-Pashaki, Ahmad-Reza Qanbarpour, and Arjang and Naser Shaygan-Shamasbi are killed. Hamid Ashraf, who is wounded in the foot, escapes. Ashraf engages the police at 05:15 around Pahlavi Square and escapes again.

16 May: Several units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee surround a second Fada'i safe house at Kouy-e Kan and attack it. Ezzat Gharavi (fifty-five years-old), Qorbanali Zarkari, Mohammad-Reza Qanbarpour, and two others, probably Farzad Dadgar and Jahangir Baqeripour, are killed.

16 May: A safe house in the Narmak neighbourhood, where the seventh issue of *Nabard-e Khalq* is being prepared, is evacuated on the instruction of Nastaran Al-e Aqa. The residents of this safe house included Marziyeh Shafi'-Tohidast, Kiyoumars Sanjari, and Fatemeh Hoseyni. This house came under attack shortly after it was evacuated.

16 May: Units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee attack a safe house on Shareq Street in Nezamabad Jonoubi neighbourhood at 13:30. All four residents of this safe house, Hamid Ashraf, Saba Bijanzadeh, Abdolreza Kalantar-Neystanaki, and Nadereh Ahmad-Hashemi, fight their way out and escape with an expropriated police car. The press reports on the death

of five policemen, including Police Colonel Gholam-Reza Fardad, at the hands of the guerrillas.

17/23 May: Hamid Ashraf is transferred to a safe house in the Tehran-Pars neighbourhood. He spends most of his time writing for the seventh issue of Nabard-e Khalq. The inhabitants of this house are Marziyeh Shafi' - Tohidast, who types Ashraf's writings, Kiyoumars Sanjari, Simin Tavakoli, Jahanbakhsh Shali, Fatemeh Hoseyni, Eskandar (alias), and Mojtaba (alias).

18 May: A safe house in Rasht is attacked by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Five residents, including Behrooz Armaghani, a member of the leadership team, Zohreh Modir-Shanehchi, and Manouchehr Hamedi, are killed.

18 May: A safe house in Qazvin is attacked by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Mitra Bolbolsefat and Esmā'il 'Abedi are killed.

18 May: A safe house in Karaj is attacked by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee. Farideh Gharavi, Hoseyn Fatemi, and Houshang Qorbani-Kandehroudi are killed.

29 May: The Shahr-e Ziba safe house comes under attack. Mina Talebzadeh-Shoushtari is killed and seven others escape.

May: SAVAK reports that university students disrupted classes, chanted slogans in favour of the "emancipated martyrs", and openly mourned the death of Fada'i guerrillas killed in gun battles.

May/June: In the last issue of People's Combat, Hamid Ashraf writes what is effectively his "five-year appraisal of the armed movement". Ashraf defends the legacy of Pouyan and Ahmadzadeh and takes sides with them in what Jazani calls irreconcilable "concepts" and "paths" (bardasht va mashy). Contrary to Jazani, Ashraf concludes that the only way to "smash the state machine" is to employ "armed struggle as both tactic and strategy".

1 June: Fourteen students take over the Iranian Consulate General in Geneva. They detain the staff of the Consulate in one room, break framed pictures of the Shah, and write anti-regime slogans on the walls.

21 June: ‘Ali-Reza Rahimi-‘Aliabadi and Hoseyn Mousadoust-Damouchali are identified by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee in two different locations in Tehran and are killed in gun battles.

23 June: At 17:30, after a long battle, Nastaran Al-e Aaqa, a member of the leadership team, Shahrzad (Golrokh) Mahdavi, and Nadali Pournaghmeh are killed in battle with units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee on ‘Obeyd Zakani Street in Tehran’s Aminolmolk neighbourhood.

26 June: Maryam Shahi is killed on Meymanat Street by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee and the police.

29 June: The safe house on Pars Street at Mehrabad Jonoubi is attacked from land and air. The Fada’i leadership team had convened to assess their situation. After a four-hour battle, the following eleven are killed: Hamid Ashraf, Mohammad-Reza Yasrebi, Mohammad Hoseyni-Haqnavaz, Gholamali Kharatpour, Mohammad-Mehdi Foqani, ‘Asgar Hoseyni-Abardeh, Yousef Qane‘-Khoshkebijari, Tahereh Khorram, Gholamreza Layeq-Mehrabani, ‘Ali-Akbar Vaziri-Asfarjani, and Fatemeh Hoseyni. The Fada’is have lost all their leadership cadres.

Late June: Fada’i operational team leaders begin studying the latest works of Jazani.

30 June: At around 10:30 in Seh Rah-e Azari, Hamid Ariyan and Behzad Amiri-Davan are identified by SAVAK agents and killed in gun battles.

30 June: At Fallah Street, Abolhasan Shaygan-Shamasbi, age sixteen, is arrested, and Afsarolsadat Hoseyni manages to escape.

1 July: At around 10:00, Afsarolsadat Hoseyni and Nadereh Hashemi are gunned down by units of the Anti-Sabotage Joint Committee in two different locations in Tehran.

12 August: At Ali Shah-Avaz, gendarmes become suspicious of Morteza Fatemi and ‘Abdolreza Kalantar-Neystanaki. They arrest ‘Abdolreza Kalantar-Neystanaki. Morteza Fatemi swallows a cyanide pill.

29 August: A ‘zamolsadat Rouhi-Ahangaran is executed after some fourteen months of imprisonment.

2 November: Homayoun Keykavousi, an Iranian diplomat in Paris, is severely wounded in front of his house. Keykavousi survives the gunshots to his chest and stomach. A French policeman is also injured.

28 November: Amnesty International (AI) releases a Briefing Paper on Iran. It reports on the outlaw and rogue nature of SAVAK, accusing it of acting with impunity inside and outside Iran to repress all opposition.

1977

10 October: Some eight thousand to fifty thousand people gather for ten nights of poetry reading at the German Club (Goethe Institute). The attractive poster publicizing the event depicts a little white fish calling out to the forest.

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